

ARENA

아레나
이계사냥기

ARENA

BOOK 01

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Arena

(아레나)

by

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Synopsis

A 29 year old civil employment exam student wakes up in a blank white room and meets a baby angel.

This baby angel informs him that he died in his sleep due to heart disease like his father and grandfather.

Remembering his mom and their last conversation he says that he will take on a series of life and death tests that the baby angel offers him.

From this point on he must put his life on the line and fight in the stage called 'Arena'.

And every time he clears a test he will have the ability to gain abilities and weapons to increase his strength to clear all the tests and get his life back.

This is his story of his fights in the 'Arena'.

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Chapter 1 - Hyun-Ho Kim (Part 1)

There are 7 billion people on the planet.

I suppose that of those people, crazy drunkards make up about 3 billion. I wish those 3 billion people would die. I really do.

Today's late night part time work at the convenience store was particularly difficult.

At around 1 AM, a drunken buffoon of a man began to down a bunch of beers all by himself.

Plenty drunk and without even paying, he began to try and eat chips, ice cream, and dried squid.

When I told him to pay and tried to stop him, he started swearing that even someone like me was looking down on him, going so far as to throw punches my way...

I thought about calling the police, but that seemed like more of a hassle so I instead just calmed the man down.

Tired from his angry fit, the man left sobbing. His life must be shit too. The sight of him walking away was so pitiful.

Even so, that doesn't give him the right to make my life shit too, right?

I finished my shift and came home.

My dark and spooky one-room basement.

A deposit of 5,000,000 won (USD \$5000) and monthly rent 300,000 won (USD \$300).

It's cold in the fall, colder in the winter, and interestingly enough, this dungeon of mine is still cold on summer nights. As an option, it also floods.

I threw off my clothes and crawled under my thick blankets. Even though it's cold because there's no heating, I'm a weird bastard that can't change my habit of sleeping naked.

I'm about to fall asleep when my smart phone starts buzzing from a phone call.

The notice says it's my mom.

“Awesome”

The end to a difficult day is mom. She's obviously calling to nag me.

“Eh, fuck it”

I decided not to pick up the phone. I can just tell her I fell asleep after work and didn't get the call.

As the vibrations stopped I figured my mom gave up on the call when this time there was a ding-dong, alerting me to a text message.

[Son, don't pretend to be sleeping. Pick up the phone. If you don't, your allowance will get cut]

...Oh.

But of course.

As soon as the phone rang, I picked it up.

"Hello?"

"Son, why didn't you pick up the phone?"

"Cuz I was pretending to sleep."

"Really? Our son is such a [hyoja](#)."

(TL: A good child; a child that takes care of their parents)

"Well, you know."

“Allowance. CUT.”

Stringing me around using money again. You think this make me tuck my tail between my legs?

“I’m sorry”

It will. I tucked it real fast. Mom laughed.

“And are you studying well?”

“I just got back from work. I’ll do it when I wake up.”

“A 2nd year examinee and you can still sleep?”

“Stop poking where it hurts.”

“Son, don’t misconstrue it, just listen to what mom has to say. My son’s head is a rock and I don’t think your life was meant to spend studying. Why don’t you just come home and run the fried chicken store with mom?”

A fastball, out of the blue.

It’s a targeted statement with no room for misunderstanding.

With a shock, I stutter a reply.

“Uh, mom. It’s because I don’t study, but my head is good”

“That’s what I thought too, two years ago. But now I won’t burden you with useless expectations. Even if the child doesn’t go to school, the job of a good parent would be to find the job that suits their child.”

Her tone was telling me that the job that suited me was the fried chicken business.

I felt fear and quickly replied.

“Mom...why not give me another chance. If I fail the exam this time, I will spend the rest of my life frying chicken like you want me to.”

“Of course. Son, next year you will be 30. The next door convenience store owner’s daughter is two years younger than you and is already married with two kids. Do you know how much the convenience store owners brag about their grandchildren?”

“Again with that.”

That fat old lady from the convenience store. She must’ve bragged about her grandchildren to mom again.

“I wonder when my son will meet a girl and get married...”

“How about I figure out my own life a little first, then we can talk about a daughter-in-law and grandchildren again.”

What crazy girl would like a 29 year old examinee bastard?

“So just forget everything and come home to the fried chick-”

“I’m gonna to hang up now”

I pressed the end call button and speedily took out the battery too.

Fried chicken, 30 years old, daughter-in-law, grandchildren, fried chicken again. It’s the fearsome combo that always knocks me down. Who wants to live their life frying chicken?

I’m in no way looking down on the fried chicken business.

My mom sold those fried chickens at a flaming pace to send her all her three kids to college.

But I hate hard work.

I just want to be an government official.

I want live my life drudging off to work, getting a steady paycheck, and getting home every night on the dot like clockwork.

In my frustration, I let out a sigh. I dug deep into my blankets and closed my eyes.

I could feel the frustration on the fringes of my chest. A closing up and closing in kind of oppressiveness.

Aw, hell, this is all just from stress.

It'll all be better after I get a good night's rest.

And so I fell asleep.

...and so I dreamed.

Chapter 2 - Hyun-Ho Kim (Part 2)

When I came to, I was in a completely empty world.

What nonsense am I spewing?

I mean exactly that. It was an empty world with nothing in it.

There was no grass, trees, and no colors here. The sky and the earth were all white. The infinite view was full of just empty space. It was a rather eerie atmosphere.

It felt as if the unending vastness of white was piercing into my mind as well.

“Wh-what the hell is this place?”

How could nothing exist? It was as if the whole world had been erased!

I looked around in utter shock.

...I never knew that having nothing to look around at would be this frightening.

‘It’s a dream.’

That was my conclusion.

Because it was a situation that couldn't be explained if this wasn't a dream.

'It's been a while since I've had a lucid dream. But man, this is a shitty dream.'

Since it wasn't a particularly enjoyable dream, I made up my mind to try and wake up. Every dream has a way of waking up from it. I put both my hands down on the white ground and bent down. Then...

“FUCK!”

Bang!

“AHHH!”

I rolled around on the ground holding onto my face from having banged it on the bare ground.

“[Aishi](#), why is it so hard.”

(TL: Korean slang that can mean damn, what the hell, etc. Pronounced kind of like the letters 'A + C' or 'I + C')

The white ground was as hard as marble. At the very least, I was sure it was harder than my head.

It was then.

“Nice to meet you, examinee Hyun-Ho Kim.”

“WHAT?!”

It was the loud and resounding voice of an energetic young child.

I was surprised and startled.

I looked all around, but could not find the owner to the voice.

‘Perhaps a ghost?’

I was creeped out at the thought of an [old hag](#). I screamed from the fear crawling within me.

(TL: Old Hag refers to a belief that when you’re sleeping, an old hag sits on your chest, not letting you move. Also known as sleep paralysis)

“Where are you? Show yourself!”

“But I’m right here.”

The voice came from above. I lifted my head and stared into the sky.

My mind went blank.

“An angel?”

There was no other explanation. It was an angel, as if it dropped out of a Michelangelo painting. He wasn't wearing any clothes and his danglers between his legs made me quite uncomfortable.

“A real angel?”

“That I am.”

The baby angel dude with the [bbundegi](#) flapped his wings and descended.

(TL: Bbundegi: pronounced bun-de-gi. It's pupa that are fried and eaten as a snack. In context...it's a tiny dick lol)

Uh...

I'm baffled. An angel in my dream? I thought maybe, so I asked.

“Tell me the lotto numbers.”

“I don't want to.”

Baby angel dude gave a sharp answer. His role is an angel and

he's a young 'un, but real impertinent. I thought of spanking his ass but held it in.

“Alright, alright, fine. Just let me wake up from this dream.”

“It's not a dream.”

“What?”

“You just verified that when you kissed the floor with your forehead.”

Those words made me alert.

“... you saw that?”

“Yup.”

The baby angel covered his mouth with both his hands and giggled.

“I saw that you were sensing it wasn't a dream with the entirety of your skull.”

My face reddens.

‘Aww man, this is embarrassing. How could I have made such a

scene!’

“When examinee Hyun-Ho Kim abused his skull, wouldn’t the pain have made him wake if this was a dream?”

The giggling bbundegi boy really called for a slap on the face.

The baby angel continued to speak.

“Or would you like to try one more time?”

“How?”

“Um, you mentioned the lotto numbers a moment ago?”

“Yeah. You gonna tell me?”

“No.”

This bbundegi bastard is upsetting me again.

“But instead I will let you experience something that will rival the chances of you winning the lottery.”

“What is that? The [pension lottery](#)?”

“Seriously, you keep speaking in terms that give away your financial status.”

My blood starting boiling at this.

“... then what is it?”

“You wanna be hit by lightning?”

...Blank....

I was taken aback.

What did this bbundegi bastard just say to me? He can't even tell me the lotto numbers and now he wants to hit me with lightning?

“Not enough to die from, just barely a zing. Here we go~~~!”

“Wait, what?! I'm not...!”

Pijijik! (sound of lightning)

“Guakkk!”

Lightning fell down from the white sky. My body convulsed as if being fried in oil. This is how the chicken that gets fried by mom must feel!

“So, how is it?”

How is it?!

“You said it wasn’t enough to kill?!”

I yelled out in fury from the likes of this kind of pain that I had never felt before. This hurt 100 times more than the anesthetic from a circumcision!

“If you were really struck with lightning, you would die without a moment to feel the pain. It hurts because it wasn’t enough to kill.”

Spewing his nonsense, the baby angel bastard intently flapped his wings and approached me. He came forward with his annoying face and continued to speak.

“Do you think you could feel all this pain if this was a dream?”

“.....!”

The words pierce me deep in my chest.

An unknown uneasiness settled into my beating heart. If this is not a dream, where the hell am I?

“Examinee Hyun-Ho Kim.”

Wait.....

That bastard has been calling me examinee from the start, right?
What does that even mean?

“Examinee Hyun-Ho Kim has been chosen by the heavens to take the exam.

“The Heavens?”

God/Deity, Buddha, Dao/Tao (The Way), The Truth. Humans call them by specific names. However, A Name, To Express In Words, Humanity, To Become A Human, it is impossible within this dimensional space to explain what these things are in absoluteness.

(ㄴ 申)(佛)(道)(眞理)(命名)(形言)(人格)(人格化)(崇拜)

(TL: Small dick angel used Chinese.

(ㄴ 益 益)ㄴ 益 益

but these should be the literal translations. He also spoke in weird Korean which is why it sounds weird in English...)

‘What is he blabbing on about?’

(TL: MC doesn’t speak Chinese so he’s confused too.)

The baby angel continued explain to me, who couldn’t even

begin to comprehend him.

“It’s like God. For understanding purposes, I said deity.”

“So...in other words, Gods, ultimate powers, those kinds of things??”

“Yes.”

“What test?”

“The test is an extremely difficult and severe battle. It’s a dangerous task where you could even die.”

“It’s so difficult I could die?”

“Yes.”

“No. I won’t do it.”

I said it sternly.

Are these people crazy? God? Angel? Does that mean you can just do whatever?

I’m living nice and well and you give me a severe assignment and you think I’ll just take it up and do it?

The baby angel had a “I’m in a difficult position” expression on his face and said the following.

“But you have to do it...”

“Why are you asking me to do this kind of thing? God? Tell your God to do it. He’s God so he should be able to do it all, all the time.”

“I cannot tell you the ultimate goal of this test. Regardless, examinee Hyun-Ho Kim must do it.”

“I don’t care. I don’t want to.”

I’m saying no, so what can they do? With this mentality, I stood my ground.

The baby angel just stared at me blankly. Man, this kid’s dangling bbundegi keeps coming into my view.

“You really won’t do it?”

“That’s right, you bbundegi bastard.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“So much so that you would rather be hit by lightning?”

At the mention of lightning, I flinch. Is he threatening me? He’s pissing me off now.

“Yeah, yeah ya bastard. Even if my preciousness became as small as a bbundegi, I still won’t!”

“Oh dear... so that means even if you die, you won’t do it?”

“Finally, you get it.”

I looked at the baby angel proudly for finally understanding. He suddenly became a very worried baby angel.

“We are in no way forcing you but rather, giving you an opportunity... the choice is up to examinee Hyun-Ho Kim.”

“Sure, thanks for the opportunity to possibly die in a severe battle. No thank you, kid.”

“Whew, I guess there’s no other choice. Then I’ll be sending you on to hell...”

“Hell?”

I'm completely taken aback.

“Hey, what! Are you threatening me? You said it's not being demanded of me!”

“Of course, it is neither a threat nor a demand. You say you don't want to do the exam so according to the schedule, we are sending you to hell.”

“Don't send me to hell! Send me back to the living world!”

The baby angel looks at me completely baffled.

“Examinee Hyun-Ho Kim.... I thought it impossible but do you really not know?”

“Know what?”

“You have died. We only bring the dead to this place.”

“.... Huh?”

“You don't think we'd take a perfectly fine person and drag him here and threaten him, do you? As you can tell, I am an angel. I am not the devil.”

The rush of anxiety.

Again, the suspicions that this must just be a bad dream.

“The cause of death for examinee Hyun-Ho Kim is heart disease. You went kaput while you were sleeping.”

He speaks just like an angel.

“You expect me to believe that?”

“You were, of course, deep in sleep and thus unconscious for it.”

“Other than getting hit by lightning by you, never in my life have I ever experienced anything close to death. How does it make sense that I never had any symptoms and then just went off in my sleep? Heart disease at my age?”

“You should have felt some pressure and uneasiness in your chest before you fell asleep...”

“...?!”

I’m completely surprised.

I remember.

I definitely felt that pressure in my chest.

“It’s genetics. Didn’t your ancestors also die of heart disease?”

Chapter 3 - The First Exam (1)

“It’s genetics. Examinee Hyun-Ho Kim’s ancestors passed away from heart disease too, did they not?”

“Uh...that’s...”

I was so shocked I couldn’t even formulate a proper response. The baby angel wasn’t saying anything wrong. Father died of a heart attack. Mom had told me that even grandfather died of a heart attack so you should be careful too.

I asked with a shaky voice

“Am I really dead?”

“It’s a pity”

Flapping his wings like a little finch, the baby angel tried to console me.

It wasn’t consoling me at all.

But I’m only 29. Born as a man and I haven’t done anything.

I didn’t have a great job, and no family to look after. I’m still a virgin! If I die, what about my family?! What about mom?!

At the thought of mom, I began breaking down.

After father passed away like he did, mom raised us three kids with a lot of difficulty.

I disappointed her this way and that way but I was still her hope.

So then what happens if even I die like this?

I wasn't able to look after her properly once.

Then was that conversation I had the night before the last conversation I'll ever have with my mom...?

My life ends just like this?

"I can't just die like this!"

"Right?"

"Ok. What do I have to do? You said you would give me an opportunity? If I do as you say can I live again?"

"Of course. You think I'd swindle you? I'm an angel. An angel!"

The baby angel pounded his chest with a stern face.

...It's because he's this kind of angel that I can't trust him.

If a sexy lady angel had suddenly appeared, I would've trusted her right away.

"I'll do whatever it takes, so save me."

"Fine. Then do you swear that as an examinee, you will your best until the very end of all the exams?"

"Yes"

The baby angel smiled widely and clapped his hands

"Yahoooooo. I congratulate you on becoming an examinee!"

"Congratulations my ass. But you just said all the exams? Are you telling me it's not just one exam?"

"Yes. It's just like any other exam, it's not just one question. Like your [employment exam](#), you have to get through different levels to get to the end."

(TL: In Korea, you take an exam(s) and then an interview before you can get hired.)

To be hearing about that damn test again really makes me hate this bbundegi bastard.

“Isn’t that a bit extreme?”

“What is?”

“Well. I think it’s a little extreme that in order to live I have to do multiple exams where I might die!”

“Oh no. That isn’t true. Every time you finish an exam we give you a rest period of 10 days to 2 months.”

“Rest period?”

“Yes. During the rest period you may get that rest period’s amount of time back into reality”

“So speaking in easier terms, every time I clear an exam, my life extends from 10 days to 2 months?”

“That is correct”

“So then what happens if I die during an exam? Does my soul just vanish or...?”

“No, there is no such thing as that. You just end up going to the

afterlife as planned. So really, you don't lose anything."

...yeah...there's nothing to lose there.

"And every time you clear an exam, you get a prize. According to the prize, your life can be better than the life you had before and of course, the biggest prize comes when you have completed all the exams and you can come back to life."

I don't think the angel is lying to me. I mean of course he has that puny bbundegi attached between his legs, but he did call lightning from the sky. He also has wings on his back. Why would a guy like this grab me and try to trick me? I don't know how hard the exams will be, but instead of going out so pitifully I might as well give it a shot

I will live again and see mom's face.

"Alright then. From now on I'm going to tell you the rules of the exam. First, tell me about notepad retrieval."

"Notepad retrieval? What is..."

BAM!

Suddenly in front of my eyes there is a board the size of a notepad

"Oh! What is this?"

In my surprise, I stared at the board hanging in the air. On the board the following things were written:

Name: Hyun-Ho Kim

Class: 1

Karma: 0

Mission: Defeat the red ape

Time limit 30 minutes 0 seconds

“What is this?”

“In order to help the examinee understand, I have written down some simple details.”

“...ok I kinda get it but what is this class and karma stuff?”

“Class is examinee Hyun-Ho Kim’s current rank. Karma, simply speaking, is your grade. So the better you do on the exam, the more points you can rack up”

“Are more points better?”

“Of course. After you clear the exam, with the karma you get you can get a prize. So the more karma you get, the bigger the prize.”

I thought carefully and asked again.

“Of the prizes I can get using the karma, are there things that will help me in later exams?”

“Well of course. You can gain good weapons, martial arts, magic, super powers. You have to use the karma well to increase your strength in order to complete all the exams.”

And at the moment, the board disappeared into thin air.

“Eh?”

“If you leave the board alone long enough, it’ll disappear on its own”

“Retrieve board”

As I said it, the board reappeared in front of my eyes

The baby angel let out a sly smile.

“The board is an ethereal object. Because it is an ethereal object, it won’t get in the way and won’t be visible to other people. If you throw it anywhere, it’ll just disappear.”

“Oh really?”

I took the board and threw it. The board made a parabola and swoosh, it disappeared.

‘Oh. That’s very interesting’

However, it’s disappointing. Because it’s an ethereal object, I can’t use it as a shield or a weapon in an urgent situation.

The baby angel clapped his hands.

“Alright. Well now that you’re all caught up, let’s start the exam!”

“Wait!”

I quickly stop the angel.

“What do you mean I’m all caught up? You have to tell me what the red ape is before I do or don’t do the exam you bbundegi bastard!”

“That you’ll just have to figure out yourself.”

“WHAT? You little shit. You should tell me if it’s an animal, a plant, or a bug.”

“Yeah...just be on your way”

He flicked his cute little finger at me.

And just then, right before my eyes, appeared a shabby door.

“This is the exam door”

“The exam door?”

“If you open that door, you’ll be entering Level Two of the arena. The arena is the stage where examinee Hyun-Ho Kim will take all of your exams”

“Arena...”

“Hurry and go through the door”

The baby angel flapped his wings and pushed my shoulder.

‘Alright I get it you bastard. Your [uncircumcised](#) self trying to tell me what to do.’

(TN: Being uncircumcised is like a sign on being uncivilized.)

I take a big gulp and grab the handle to the exam door.

Screeeeeeeeeeeeech

Through the crack of the open door, a bright light floods in.

It was so bright that I couldn't see what was over the threshold of the door.

I hesitate for a moment and take one step and pray.

I am hoping that when I get past this door, I will awake from this dream. I want to be able to wake up complaining and laughing about this ridiculous dream.

Chapter 4 - The First Exam (Part 2)

“OHHHHH FUCK.”

Definitely not a dream. Instead of the one room basement that I should be sleeping in, an expansive forest welcomes me.

As if being expansive isn't enough, it's quite a disgusting forest.

The trees are so absurdly large that the sky can't be seen. And vines bigger than my arms are coiled all around them. The energy of the wild permeates throughout. And with every step I take, I can feel the crunch of the weeds vividly on the bottom of my feet.

It has been a long time since I have walked barefoot

“...huh?”

Barefoot?

“WHAT? WHAT FUCKERY IS THIS?!”

I finally noticed how shitty my appearance was.

My body is bare, with nothing but black underwear on.

I've been brought here in what I fell asleep in.

In this expansive forest in nothing but my underwear. Am I fucking Tarzan? They should've given me clothes and shoes!

“Sigh...”

What use is fairness here? The important thing now is to concentrate on clearing this exam.

As if the forest was wrapped around a mountain, there are slopes. In order to check out my surroundings, I headed to higher ground.

In 5 minutes I arrive at a small shallow cliff and look below me.

“WHAT IS THIS?!”

I am stupified. The forest is so massive, I can't see the end.

“Board retrieval!”

Name: Hyun-Ho Kim

Class: 1

Karma: 0

Mission: Eliminate the red ape

Time limit: 24 minutes 43 seconds

The first mission limit time was 30 minutes and now I only have 24 minutes left. I thought I could just search through the forest and find the red ape but now I realize that's not going to happen.

This forest is ridiculously large. I'm supposed to search through all of this in 30 minutes? Without knowing what a red ape is?

"It's impossible! This mission was impossible from the beginning!"

Red ape. It could be an animal or it could be a plant. It could even be a person or a monster I've never seen before. The name of that bird flying over there could be red ape too. I know nothing.

The bbundegi bastard had just carelessly thrown me into this arena. And to top it all off, just 30 minutes? Are these people crazy? I am filled with rage.

Are they toying with a man whose only hope is just to live? Are they mocking me?

Then all of a sudden I recall the baby angel's voice.

“You must figure that out on your own.”

That’s what he told me when I asked him what the red ape is without any other clues.

He was of the mind that I would figure out what the red ape is in this forest full of animals and plants.

‘Ok. Lets calm down and think about this’

I organized my thoughts.

Firstly: The time limit is just 30 minutes.

Secondly: He didn’t tell me what the red ape is.

Thirdly: They wouldn’t give me a mission that is impossible.

Knowing these three things, I reorganized my thoughts.

Is there a way for me to figure out what a red ape is?

There is!

A certain thought brushes across my mind. A way to find out what the red ape is. A way to find out in less than the 30 minutes time limit.

Have the red ape attack me!

If I get attacked, even though I don't know what it is, I'll what it is regardless of what it ends up being.

This explains why the exam time is only 30 minutes. If the red ape was close from the beginning, there was no need for them to give me more time.

'This is it.'

I am filled with reassurance as if I've solved a math problem.

Although it seems dire, now that I think back, the hints were enough.

Alright. Let's think this through one more time.

First: The red ape was close from the beginning.

Secondly: The plan of attack is to have the red ape attack me.

Thirdly: I've wandered for about 5 minutes and haven't discovered the red ape.

The answer is 1. The red ape has found me and is tracking behind

me waiting for an opportunity to attack.

‘If he’s been tracking me from behind there is no way I would have noticed it. Even now he’s hiding somewhere looking at me.’

Chills.

Now that that thought has crossed my mind, my hair stands up in fear.

Right now that thing is looking at me, waiting to attack. In order to kill me.

‘In that case...’

At the end of my brainstorming, I lean my back against a nearby tree and collapsed to the ground.

“Ahh I’m so fucking tired I could die.”

I chatter on by myself so that it can hear me.

I do this in case the thing can understand human speech. Or it could even be a person. I close my eyes and pretend to sleep.

As I do this, my right hand grasps at the earth and grabs a decent sized rock

‘Ok. This is the chance I’ve been waiting for. Come on. Attack me’

Lion, tiger, leopard. It won’t be a beast that I can’t handle.

That would be too simple. If it was a beast like that, why would it hesitate? It would’ve attacked me sooner and eaten me.

There’s only one reason why it hasn’t appeared and has carefully been tracking me this far. It’s either because its strength is similar to mine, or weaker.

It has to be something that I could possibly win against.

‘Hurry and attack me. I don’t know what you are but I wanna see what you look like’

Thinking these things, I pretend to sleep for another 3 minutes. But on the inside, my ears are alert and listening for any sounds. And then, there it is.

Crunch (Sound of stepping on leaves.)

I hear a bush shaking.

‘It’s come!’

The anticipation rises in my throat.

Crunch. Crunch.

I hear more bush sounds. It seems a bit unnatural.

I laugh to myself.

Brazen bastard.

It's making sounds on purpose. It's checking to see if I'm asleep.

I don't move. I keep snoring and breathing as if I'm asleep.

Soft and tender footsteps are beginning to be delicately heard.

It's careful and swift, but unable to erase the sound of its footsteps completely.

Step step.

It keeps coming closer.

It seems positive now that I am asleep.

I feel like my right hand still holding onto the rock is going to start cramping soon. I so badly want to stand up right now, open my eyes, and throw the rock.

‘Not yet.’

Be patient.

The sound of the footsteps has come very close. I feel like my chest will explode.

‘NOW!’

I quickly get up and throw the rock.

BAM!

The flying rock lands on its forehead and blood begins to flow.

“Ggirook!”

It lets out a weird, mysterious scream. The bastard holds onto its bleeding forehead and falters in place.

It was the golden chance to take it to the ground, but I was so surprised that my body had frozen in place. It was because of the identity of the red ape.

Chapter 5 - Clear (Part 1)

It had one head, a pair of arms, and a pair of legs. It has eyes, a nose, a mouth, ears, and walks upright. But with a bent waist, interestingly long arms, and a body completely covered in red hair.

“It’s ...an anthropoid?”

Indeed. The identity of the red ape is an anthropoid. Kind of like a man and monkey mixed half and half. In appearance, it was closer to a monkey, but the expression of surprise and pain on its face was similar to a human.

‘I was supposed to eliminate this?’

I can’t even capture a chicken. A plain animal would have been better. This is analogous to a human.

“Kirook! Ggiroorook!”

The bastard’s thinking seems to be different than mine. He looks at me with thoughts intent on killing me. At the end of his right hand I can see he is holding on to a hatchet with a sharp rock tied to the tip.

‘Isn’t that a hand weapon?’

Damn it. Seems he has the ability to craft a weapon.

‘If I get hit by that, I’ll meet my end’

Shit. I hesitated for no reason.

When I had succeeded in my attack, I should’ve gone in and taken that first!

“Ggiroorook!”

It shouts loudly and the red ape threatens me.

Without even thinking, I am alarmed and take a step back. That was clearly a mistake.

As I took a step back, the bastard grew confident. He began to shorten the distance. Thankfully, the bastard’s size is only about 150 cm tall (almost 5 feet tall.) His arms and legs are thin and don’t look incredibly strong.

‘I should get a weapon...’

At this point, while I’m looking at the ground, I’m looking for a rock to throw.

“Kirook!”

As if he had been waiting for me to turn away, he attacks.

“Huk!”

Without knowing that I was doing it, I guarded myself with my left arm.

The stone headed hatchet he was holding pierced my elbow.

BAM

“ACKKKK!”

A scream automatically escapes from my lips.

It hurt like the muscles in my left arm were being ripped. The tears flow.

“YOU FUCKER!”

In my rage, not looking left or right, I attack.

I quickly grab his right wrist which is holding the stone headed hatchet. I grab it tightly and twist it around and he drops the hatchet screaming.

‘I did it!’

I am actually stronger. As long as he doesn’t have a weapon, my chances of winning are much greater.

...

[Book!](#)

(TN: it’s a noise, not...well...a book.)

“ACK!”

The hatchet wasn’t his only weapon. I felt it through my left cheek that the bastard’s nails are also a sharp weapon.

Even so, only because I reflexively turned my head did I just get scratched like this. I almost lost an eye. But there’s no time to catch my breath.

In addition to his nails being his weapons, so are his front teeth. As if imprinting his teeth, the red ape bites down hard on my left shoulder.

[“Kwajig.”](#)

(TN: It’s supposed to be a biting down sound.)

“KAAK! SHIT! LET GO!”

I let out a scream and, in an effort to throw him off. I shake my body and throw my fists around.

The bastard clings and hangs off of me and thrusts his teeth deeper.

The bastard's front teeth are long and sharp. If he evolved, he would probably turn into a vampire.

I'm flailing around in my pain and fall into a panic.

Because he was small, I assumed less of him, but now that I look at it, this fight is not in my favor.

In comparison to the red ape, which has probably experienced many fights like this, I'm just a normal guy that has never fought once in my entire life.

The blood keeps flowing from my scratched cheek and bitten shoulder.

"I'm gonna die like this!"

The fear sets into me and I urgently search my surroundings.

All the vines hanging between the branches catch my eye and I think 'this is it.'

Having discovered my vein of hope, I start walking in that direction.

The bastard is still hanging off of my body; still engrossed in biting my shoulder.

“Gulp gulp.”

As I see his throat swallow, I get shivers down my spine

Disgusting thing!

This bastard is all caught up in sucking my blood out.

I grab him with my left arm and with my right, untangle some of the vines.

He finally realizes that something weird is going on and comes to his senses. But it's already too late.

I swiftly wrap his neck in vines.

“Kirook?!”

The red ape stubbornly resists.

I tug on the vine in my right hand as hard as I can.

The vine tightens around the bastard's neck super tight.

“Kirook...!”

“Die you bastard!”

I almost died and so, like a crazy person, I tug on the vine and choke the bastard's neck.

The red ape goes pale and white.

His feisty flailing dies down.

I wonder how much time has passed.

His eyes flip over and his mouth starts foaming. It is only now, after the stress passed, that I realize what I have done.

“Ack!”

I let go of the vine and take a step back.

[Koong!](#)

(Thud sound)

The red ape's body falls to the ground and flips around.

I gasp for breath and stare at the corpse.

‘Did I just do this?’

The animal that was so fiercely alive with movement has become an eerie corpse. It has a pained expression on its face.

I made this.

A safe and average life, although lame, but a peaceful life, was the life that I had lived.

And to think that even inside of me, such violence existed; I could not believe it.

‘Damn.’

To shake off the nasty feeling, I call upon my board.

Name: Hyun-Ho Kim

Class: 3

Karma: +500

Mission: Eliminate the red ape

Time Limit: –

The changes on the board were telling me that I have cleared my mission.

And then...

BAM

Right in front of me appeared a familiar door.

It's the mission door.

CREEEEK~~

I open the door and step inside.

I am now tired, I want to rest.

[Bboo-bboo!](#)

(TN: sound of a horn)

“Congratulations! Wow! You’ve achieved a great score!”

The baby angel flaps about like a little fruit fly, obnoxiously blowing into a tiny horn that he got from god knows where.

Congratulations?

Do you think I’m in the mood right now to deal with your jokes?

“SHUT UP!”

I scream in a loud voice.

It was only then that the baby angel parts the horn from his lips and stares straight at me.

“Oh. Are you upset?”

‘Damn.’

I dug deep inside to control the boiling rage inside of me.

I don’t know if the baby angel knows of these feelings of mine but he gently pats me on my shoulders.

“You must feel uncomfortable because you’ve killed a beast that resembled a human. Well. What are you gonna do. You just have to get used to it.”

“I’m supposed to become used to this shitty feeling? Do I look like that kind of person to you?”

“Yes, you do look like that kind of person.”

At the angel’s answer, I become [a chick eating honey](#).

(TN: An idiom meaning that he just stops responding. Like a chick that makes noise but stops when you give it honey to eat.)

The baby angel spoke.

“I’m sure you caught on that the red ape was a hybrid race.

“...of course.”

I’m sure that it was tracking me and cautiously waiting to attack all as a method of hunting. And that disgusting image of it sucking the blood out of my shoulder...

And the crazy gaze in that bastard’s eyes showing it wanted to eat me.

“If you hadn’t’ killed it, examinee Hyun-Ho Kim would have met a dreadful end. Just like the rules of nature, it was a fair fight. Did

anyone ever criticize a predator for hunting its prey? Did anyone every say it's wrong to go up against a predator?"

"I know too. It's not like I'm feeling guilt or anything!"

I say it shaking.

"It's just that it's scary knowing that such violence exists inside of me."

"While you are completing the arena's exams, you cannot be protected with laws. Examinee Hyun-Ho Kim must accept violence as a means for survival."

"..."

"Hey...try being a little happier than that. You got 3 class and 500 karma on your exam. Do you know how great these scores are?"

"Great score my ass. After I've become this bloody mess...huh?"

I stopped mid-sentence in surprise. It was as if all the injuries had been washed off my body.

The elbow that had been axed. The bitten shoulder. Both were both clean.

“Once you pass through the door, all injuries and diseases become completely healed.”

“Oh that’s very convenient.”

“Of course. Examinee Hyun-Ho Kim’s heart diseases also disappeared when you passed through the door.”

“Really?”

“Yes. Now you don’t have to worry about dying from heart disease. Happy?”

“I’m so frickin’ happy about it. Now, as long as I don’t get fucked over completing these exams, I don’t have to worry about dying. Wow. So happy. I feel like I could live a thousand, ten thousand years.”

“Oh there you go again. Stop with your sarcasm and listen for a minute. I say again, but examinee Hyun-Ho Kim’s first exam scores were ridiculously good.”

“What in particular did I do so well? I barely escaped with my life. “

“The only thing with the red ape is that you weren’t used to violence. You can get special training and learn to be more disciplined. The reason you got a high score was because of your decision making.”

“Decision making?”

“Yes. Using all of the given hints, it took you less than 6 minutes to realize the red ape was hiding and waiting for you. Usually, people can’t do what examinee Hyun-Ho Kim did.”

Now that I hear it this way, I suddenly feel awesome.

“According to you, if I’m such an awesome bastard, how come I keep failing the government exam?”

“Examinee Hyun-ho Kim’s decision making skills only kick in when you’re in danger. Duh”

The baby angel continues to speak.

“You haven’t shaped up because you haven’t starved. You probably would’ve passed the exam had you been threatened with death when you weren’t studying.”

“ ... ”

It’s fair so I have nothing to say back.

“Check your board.”

“Board retrieval.”

I retrieve my board.

Name: Hyun-Ho Kim

Class: 3

Karma: +500

Mission: Rest until your next exam

Time Limit: 11 days

The descriptions have changed again and I have been given 11 days to rest. It's like my death has been put off for another 11 days.

“When you return to the real world, it'll be 11 AM and you'll be waking up from your sleep. However, if you chalk this all up to being a dream, things will began to get very complicated.”

“And the prize? I thought the karma could be traded for a prize.”

“Once you return to the real world and retrieve your board, you will find out how you can claim your prize.”

“I can retrieve my board in the real world too?”

“Yes. Besides, the board is only visible to you anyhow.”

“Got it.”

The baby angel waves his cute little hand at me.

“Alright then. Have a happy break.”

Ddak-

The baby angel flings his finger and yet another door appears.

I open the door and walk through.

Chapter 6 - Clear (Part 2)

I wake up and check my smart phone. It is exactly 11. Not a minute's difference.

I look around and my studio basement's familiar atmosphere comes into view.

‘I’m alive!’

Perhaps this is because I had narrowly escaped death. How could I be so happy returning to a world that I thought was so tedious and mundane?

‘Wait. Was that all a dream?’

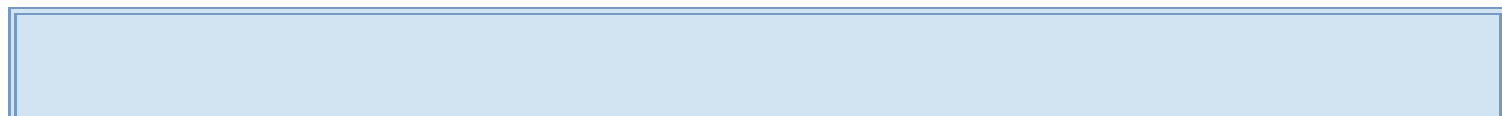
The suspicion surges in. perhaps it was all just a very vivid [dog dream](#).

(TN: Meaningless.)

There is one easy way to verify if that was a dream or real.

“Board retrieval”

The board appears.



Name: Hyun-Ho Kim

Class: 3

Karma: +500

Mission: Rest until the next exam

Time Limit: 11 days

You may receive your karma prize. To receive your karma prize, retrieve your board and say 'karma prize.'

So it wasn't a dream. I was hopeful that it was.

After the 11 days I have been given, I suppose I will be dragged back to the world of the Arena and fight to the death.

The red ape was a weak bastard so somehow, I was able to defeat him. But there is no telling what kind of monster will appear in the second exam.

I have to receive the karma prize, whether that is a good weapon or skill, so that I can become stronger.

"Karma prize."

As I said it, the letters on the board began to wiggle and change.

-Select the prize you wish obtain.

Skill – Gain a capability.

Item – Weapon, shield, goods, etc.

Other – Turn an object from the real world into an item. The object that is turned into an item can be carried in with you to the exam.

Residual karma: 500

“Hmm...skill?”

At my words, the letters on the board change once more.

-Select the category of skill that you wish to choose.

Main skill – Basic skills that the examinee can use are needed for the completion of the exam. This is the most important skill in determining the examinee’s chances of passing the exam. Only one can be chosen. According to your skill level, the main skills that are available have been chosen.

Secondary skill – Aside from the main skill, the secondary

skill aids the examinee as another skill and any can be chosen as long as you follow the conditions.

Residual karma: 500.

So it looks like I can only get 1 main skill and multiple secondary skills.

In simple terms, one major and multiple minors.

‘So in that case, the most important thing is the main skill.’

I decide to choose my main skill first.

“Main skills.”

-There are two main skills that meet examinee’s Hyun-Ho Kim’s level. Please select your desired main skill.

Aura control: You control your aura and surpass the limits of your mortal self.

*Entry – level 1: Ability to control your internal aura (-400).

Spirit Summoning: Contract with a spirit and use its strength.
Engage with a spirit and use its natural strength.

*Spirits available for selection – Fire, Wind.

*Entry level 1: You may use the above spirit for two hours.
Each time you use its powers, the time decreases (-400).

Residual karma: 500

Aura control and spirit summoning...after reading the description, I kind of get an idea of what these skills are.

The aura control is similar to the eastern idea of gathering chi in the dantian. On the other hand, the spirit summoning sounds like I call upon an element and have it fight for me.

‘The summoning sounds better.’

Let’s think about this. With the aura control, I have to gather the aura and do the fighting myself. But with the summons, I can have it fight for me. Simply put, the latter is the safer method!

Hmm...anyway that (-400) written there probably means it's gonna cost 400 karma. Currently, I have 500 karma. So if I do the summoning entry level 1, I'll be left with 100 karma.

‘What should I do with the leftover karma?’

After a brief moment, I speak to the board.

“Show me all the weapons that can be gained with 100 karma.”

And once again, the letters on the board change.

The AI on this board is killer.

-Please select the category weapon.

Katana

Spear

Mace/Hammer (Literally says blunt object)

Throwing knives (literally says hidden weapon)

Bow and arrow

Other

Residual karma: 500

Good. I will become a great swordsman!

...that thought about selecting number 1 is definitely not happening.

Are they crazy? Do they think this is some fantasy novel?

Clearly, the long distance weapon is the safe and wise choice. But the long distance weapon number 5 seems difficult to use unless you're a trained expert.

Isn't there anything like a gun? I'm confident in my marksmanship. When I was in the army, I even gained a lot of vacation days by being a good marksman.

"Number 6, other."

I think maybe and I select number 6.

-This category is for other weapons that can be selected with 100 karma. Please select the weapon.

Underneath was a large list of all kinds of weapons. Sling, knuckles, poison dart. All difficult weapons to use. I skim through the list and on the 12th item, my eyes stop.

“It has it!”

Surprisingly, there is a gun.

Magic Gun

Place the bullet in the chamber. After placement, cock the weapon, and a powerful magic bullet will shoot out. Usage is easy and simple. (-100)

*Effective distance: 60 meters

*Maximum Range: 150 meters

*Comes with 100 bullets and cartridge

A gun that is worth exactly 100 karma.

A weapon with very clear benefits.

However, it does seem like it would be inconvenient that every time I need to shoot, I have to place a bullet one by one each time.

The distance is short, and because the bullets are like round marbles, it seems like the penetrating power will be weak.

I do like that it says the usage is simple and easy. Also, because it doesn't use gunpowder, it'll be safer and quieter.

“Ok. I’m gonna do this one for the weapon.”

The only weapon that I can use is a gun anyway. Now I’m wondering how to use the 500.

Firm in my decision, I say to the board,

“I will purchase the Spirit Summon Level 1 and The Magic Gun.”

-You have selected Spirit Summon Level 1. Please select the spirit you wish to summon.

The fire spirit: Kasa

The wind spirit: Sylph

In shooting, there is nothing as important as wind. I’m thinking that the wind spirit and a gun will be a good combination.

Paaat!

Suddenly, a light flows out from the board. It’s so bright that I have to cover my face with my hands.

A short while later, the light disappears and the letters on the board have changed.

-You have acquired Main Skill Entry Level 1. You can review all the skills that you have acquired by saying “skill review.”

-You have acquired the magic gun. If you say “weapon” it will retrieve your weapon. If you say “weapon cancel” your weapon will disappear.

-You have acquired the bullet cartridge. If you say “equip,” your tool will be retrieved. If you say “tool cancel” your tool will disappear.

-Residual karma: 0

Let’s see.

Skill review, weapon, weapon cancel, equip, tool cancel.....

I carefully read the orders on the board and decide to give them a try, one by one.

“Skill review.”

As I say it, new words immediately appear on the board.

-Spirit Summon (Main Skill): You are retrieving the low level wind spirit, Sylph. If you say “Sylph” it will be retrieved.

*Entry level 1: Retrieval period 2 hours

When you use Sylph’s power, the time limit remaining is reduced.

(TN: Literally says: ‘Use Sylph’s power and it will use time.’ So what I assume it means is that the more power Sylph uses, the less time it can be summoned.)

“Sylph.”

A stream of wind swooshes in and wraps around my face once before passing by.

A tiny whirlwind blows in and creates an opaque shape. The wind spirit, Sylph, has appeared.

Sylph’s appearance is...

-Meow

“A cat?”

I’m completely surprised.

A tiny kitten, in its opaque appearance, was meowing and gave me a friendly look.

It delicately jumped onto my shoulder and rubs its face on my cheek.

Oh, it's extremely cute.

“Nice to meet you”

-Meow

It seems Sylph is also pleased to meet me.

As I pet it, it starts to purr and enjoy itself.

Alright. Now that I've retrieved the spirit, let's try the item.

“Weapon, equip.”

I say the two orders back to back.

PAAT! PAAT!

In my right hand was the magic gun and my hip was wrapped

with a [leather bandolier](#) with the bullet cartridge attached to it.

(TN: An ammo belt like you would see in an old west cowboy movie)

Interesting. That it automatically buckles onto me just with spoken words.

I open the bullet cartridge and tiny lead marbles are densely packed inside. These must be the lead bullets.

The magic gun is about a meter in length and made of wood. It's light so it should be easy to carry around.

“Weapon cancel. Tool cancel.”

The magic gun and the bullet belt disappear.

And so I've used all my 500 karma and received my prizes.

I'll find out if these were good choices at the next exam.

Chapter 7 - Reward

I became determined to surpass my life of being an [eternal student](#).

(TN: Literally says a person studying for the civil exam.)

The break period is merely 11 days. I don't know how much more life I have left. Therefore, I can't waste the precious time I have left in this one room basement. I called the landlady and told her I will be emptying my space immediately. We decided that I would get the security deposit back once she gets a new tenant.

I called the convenience store manager where I had been part-timing. I lied, saying that I was hit by a motorcycle and fractured my leg. The manager argued and begged, but what is he going to do. I'm saying I broke it.

After quitting work, lastly, I give my mom a call. The store opens at 2 pm, so she's probably still at home?

Of course, mom picks up the phone as soon as it starts to ring.

“Oh. Son. You never call me first.”

It had only just been a day, but mom's voice was so warm and inviting.

Without being aware, my lips made a smile.

“Mom, I called because I missed you.”

“Ho. Son, have you been day drinking?”

“No.”

“I see. You need cash, huh?”

“Last week was my paycheck day.”

“But you’re in the stage where your paycheck just briefly touches your bank account.”

“This is true. But I still have some wiggle room.”

“Then why did you call? Oh. Is it because of the civil exam? Because you don’t think you’ll get it this time and you want to ask for another chance until next year?”

“...Mom. What do you take me for?”

“I take you for a [rock headed son](#).”

(TN: Meaning you have a rock in your head instead of a brain.)

“Anyway. I’m going to return home”

“What?”

Mom asked me with surprise in her voice.

I answered.

“I’m going to quit the civil exam and will be returning immediately tomorrow. Whether I fry chicken or stir it, I’m going to do what you tell me to do.”

“Son, did something happen?”

Yeah. I died once.

I smiled and replied back.

“Just... I felt like my life is too precious to be spent in a wishy washy manner. And I want to [hyodo](#) you too.”

(TN: Kind of like to take care of your parents as a way to pay them back for raising you.)

“Really?”

“What. Why?”

“Oh my goodness son! I’m so moved I’m about to cry. My

goodness!”

“Yuppp. Take it all in. Your son is this filial.”

And through the smart phone, I could hear the conversation.

“Hey Hyun-ji, your [oppa](#) has finally given up and is going to come home!”

(TN: What a younger sister calls an older brother.)

“Really? Jeez, that’s a relief. I was getting worried about him living like that. Being over 30 and all.”

‘These jerks...’

I quench my anger and speak.

“Anyway, I’m coming back tomorrow so clean out my room.”

“Ok of course of course. Mom will make you some delicio...”

“Not fried chicken. I want [bossam](#).”

(TN: Kimchi filling with boiled pork belly that is wrapped in salted cabbage leaves.)

“Ok. I’ll make you some bossam then.”

‘Perhaps it was because mom was so excited to have me back home, her voice was giddy.

After the phone call, I call the mover’s center and got a moving truck.

Organizing my life only took 30 minutes.

‘I will no longer waste even one minute or one second.’

I firmly promise myself this.

The place my family lives in is an apartment located in the Seobuk province in the city of Cheonan.

Right next to it was the Cheonan bus terminal, so transportation was simple, and being 1800 sq ft with 4 rooms, there was plenty of space for mom and us 3 siblings.

Riding in the mover’s car, I arrived home. With the driver’s help, I unloaded the car. Because I don’t have many things, it didn’t take very long.

“Thank you very much. On the way back, please have a meal on me.”

“Oh. Thank you.”

I gave him a [\\$10 bill](#) and he departed with his car with a smile.

(TN: \$10 is more than enough for a meal in Korea. A good sized bowl of noodles at a food stall is around \$6.)

I look around at my empty hallway of the house. After spending years cooped up in a basement studio, seeing this wide hallway is like a breath of fresh air.

“Wow. I should’ve come home sooner.”

And I think to myself.

‘Wow, I spent so much time wasted in that tiny dungeon.’

If I had known I was going to die of heart disease at 29, I wouldn’t have spent my life that way.

Organizing my things took less time than I thought.

‘I don’t want to just sit here and waste my time.’

The time that has been given to me is 11 days. Every minute, every second, is precious.

I walk into the kitchen I see that in the sink, dishes have been stacked mountains high. Looking at the site, I smile to myself.

“I knew this is what would happen.”

Mom and my older sister were busy working, and so the household chores fell to my younger sister, Hyun-ji. But Hyun-ji is currently a college senior preparing for a job. On top of it, she isn't super diligent and the house was a mess.

‘Now that I'm unemployed, I should do it.’

I roll up my sleeves and did the dishes. After finishing quickly, I take out the vacuum cleaner.

‘Hold on. Don't I have a spirit I can summon?’

“Sylph”

-Meow.

Sylph appears and delicately climbs onto my head. I die from cuteness when it shifts its tail back and forth, tap tapping on my head.

“Sylph, can you use your wind power and gather all the dust in the house into one spot?”

-Meow.

Sylph nods her head.

And then, a single gust of wind blows in and out through my house.

Swish.

Under the sofa, behind the TV, under the bed, on top of all the closets. The wind swept through every nook and cranny and stopped at my feet.

“Yuck. Look at all this dust.”

A dust bunny nearly the size of my head sat in front of me. It was the result of collecting all the dust in the entire house.

As if someone might say it's not a household with 3 women, the amount of hair was ridiculous. Ick...gross.

-Meow.

Sylph swishes her tail back and forth from atop the dust bunny. She stares up at me with glistening eyes as if to ask if she did a good job.

“Thanks Sylph. You did a really good job.”

-Meow.

Sylph rubs her face against my cheek. Aww man. I can totally see why people raise cats.

Thanks to Sylph’s assistance, the house cleaning ended really quickly. Now what should I do?

‘Maybe I should exercise in preparation for the 2nd exam?’

Of course, there won’t really be a big difference from 11 days of exercising, but it’s better than not doing it at all.

There’s actually a hiking trail on Taejo Mountain and it should be some good exercise. The 1st exam location was a forest in a mountain. I never know if there will be more occasions for fighting in forests or mountains. The time given to me is but 11 days. However, if I hike every day, I’ll become familiar with the environment and my stamina might improve a little.

I put on my sweats and tennis shoes and leave the house. Having arrived at the entrance to Taejo Mountain, I ambitiously choose the longest trail, which takes 1 hour and 50 minutes. I am determined to finish this trail once a day.

Not long after starting the trail, I become short of breath and my footsteps become heavy.

‘Should I have picked an easier trail for the first time?’

After a moment of a weakness, I lift up my head and promise myself.

‘No whining. This is matter of life. Even if it’s hard, I have to go through with it.’

It was an interesting turn of events. After a life full of no ambition and goals, for the first time, there was a clear goal.

Exam, arena, live!

It was a surprising dynamic.

As I steadfastly climbed the Taejo Mountain trail, my breath escapes me and I start panting like the wind, so much so that passing elderly hikers stare at me. Even then, I don’t stop and continue to trek forward.

Even while feeling dizzy and feeling like I might vomit, I stubbornly continue to step forward. I am still in my lively 20s. If I can’t complete this trail without resting, then I fail at being a man.

‘No one will save me. I have to flail about on my own.’

Tired and exhausted, I finally get to the summit of the mountain

and I can see the whole expanse of the city of Cheonan. My soul feels lifted and the cold wind refreshingly cools my sweat. My heart and body is tired, but perhaps because of it, I feel even more refreshed. It is because up to now, I have never given my all towards anything before.

‘Pitiful bastard.’

I come to regret my past life. I hate myself for having lived a life without concentrating enough to climb one mounting.

“I’ll forgive you this once, but from now on, let’s not live like that Kim Hyun-ho.”

After the firm promise to myself, I return down the path I came and head home.

Chapter 8 - Family (Part 1)

After returning from my hike, I see that my younger sister, Hyun-ji, is home. It seems she has just returned from school.

“Oh my gosh! Oppa, you’ve lost a lot of weight.”

“It’s from all the struggles from studying.”

“Haha that’s funny. It’s probably because of eating only cup ramen and triangle rice from the convenience store you worked at.”

“Oh...so you know.”

“Anyway, did you do all the cleaning and the dishes?”

“Indeed.”

“Whoa. Really?”

“I know you’re really busy preparing for the workforce right now. I temporarily have nothing to do, so all this stuff I’ll do for you.”

At my words, Hyun-ji’s eyes become wide. With an uneasy and anxious expression she says.

“Who are you?”

“I’m your oppa”

“Lies. My oppa is not this kind.”

“I think you need to get hit.”

As I am about to flick her forehead, she squeals and runs away and after going back and forth, Hyun-ji says this.

“Don’t you need to eat dinner? Mom and [unni](#) says they’re going to be late.”

(TN: Unni is what a younger sister calls her older sister. Pronounced uhn-nee.)

“Oh really? You want to order something?”

“What do you mean order? Mom made bossam already? I’ll set the table.”

This time I stare at her with eyes full of suspicion.

“Who are you? My younger sister is not so domesticated as to set the table.”

Hyun-ji giggles and laughs.

And then she says.

“I have my integrity. You said you did all the dishes and cleaned the house. The least I can do is set up the table and dinner for you.”

“Really? Sounds about right. It’s not like just because you’re a senior, you’re going to start studying all of a sudden when you didn’t study before...”

“Hey. Excuse me. But I am working hard at preparing for the workforce right now, ok?”

“I heard that mom caught you last time you went to play at the club.”

At my criticism, Hyun-ji pouts her lips.

“It was just to uplift my mood. I didn’t go meet guys and play with them. I just went with a friend and danced.”

“Tsk tsk. It’s really a problem that you like to play so much.”

“Oh shut up. Go and wash up while I set up the table. You [daebak](#) smell like sweat.”

(TN: Something similar to mean extreme, but more like fricking in this case. It can also mean amazing, crazy, etc.)

“Yes yes.”

While she set the table, I took a shower and changed my clothes.

Bossam, kimchi, brown rice, and an assortment of side dishes were deliciously set up before me. I was surprised because there was even some [seaweed soup](#). It's not even anyone's birthday. But at the news of my return, it seems mom was extremely excited.

(TN: Seaweed soup is usually only made on birthdays.)

“Hurry up and eat, its cooling down.”

“Ok.”

In good spirits we sat down at the table, watching TV while eating our dinner.

“Time really must have passed by.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, in the old days, you and I used to fight to the point where the house might flip over.”

“Yeah that's true. Actually, up until yesterday, at the news that you might be returning home, I was full of thoughts of pushing my

chores onto you. But because you did all the dishes and the cleaning, it took a poke at my integrity too.”

“You bitch. You must have been super excited at the thought of giving me all your chores.”

“Haha. Well, since you said you’ll be doing it all for me, I’ll do the cooking and laundry then.”

“Alright, sounds good. It’s not like there’s only a few women’s underwear so it would’ve been weird for me to do the laundry anyway.”

“Ha. Uncomfortable with a couple lady’s underwear? Oppa, are you still a virgin?”

This bitch?

“Mom and [noona’s](#) underwear is no problem but I feel like your underwear would be frivolous. So as an oppa, it frightens me a bit”

(TN: What a younger brother calls and older sister.)

“What? What do you take me for!”

“A club addict.”

“Humph. Better than being unemployed.”

“Haha. Don’t you graduate soon?”

“Well...so?”

“Just saying. I can’t wait till next year.”

“Fine. Go on railing me. But I’m going to get employed.”

“Yeah well, when I graduated I thought it would all go according to plan too...”

“Oh don’t look at me with that expression. I’ll never become unemployed like you.”

“Hey hey, who do you keep calling unemployed?”

“Well then what are you?”

“The [morning star](#) of the fried chicken business.”

(TN: Could possibly also mean the rising star.)

Hyun-ji rolls around laughing.

Time really passes by. To think that a day like this would come where I would talk about employment and life hopes with a sister six years my junior.

“Lately, unni has been saying she wants to get married and has been asking mom to [find some suitors](#).

(TN: It isn’t uncommon in Korea to ask your mom to ask her friends if they know about any available guys.)

“Really? Then again, she’s already 33 so it’s about time.”

“Isn’t it so weird? I mean she’s not lacking in anything, so why doesn’t she have a man? She’s pretty and her body is nice and she’s a lawyer. If it were me, I would have 100 guys lined up.”

“Is noona you?”

“Still, it’s weird. Seeing as how she wants to get married, she isn’t a lone wolf, and she isn’t a lesbian.”

“Well noona is a bit much. Her words are few, but her personality is really strong and her cold stare is enough to deter the average guy.”

Hyun-ji laughs at it all.

“Yeah. Unni’s expressions are a bit scary. I’m up in your face to you, but I can’t dare say a thing to unni. Even when I got caught playing at the club, I was more scared of her finding out and yelling at me.”

“Yeah well, don’t ever come crawling to me.”

“Yeah right.”

I let out a deep sigh.

“Meh. Who am I to be talking about anybody else. At least noona makes good money and is pretty popular. As for all the dating I’ve ever done was when I entered college. I met eyes with a girl at orientation and we dated for half a year, and that’s all. After that, father passed away and the household became chaotic. I was going to school, working two part time jobs, and then took the army exam...”

I gather my thoughts and realized that I really might finish my life without ever feeling love. I’m seriously a pitiful guy. As I keep letting out my deep sighs, Hyun-ji stares at me with eyes full of sympathy.

“Should I introduce you to a friend of mine?”

Ahh temptation.

The thought of meeting a girl right before I die enters my mind. However, I shake my head.

“No thanks.”

Maybe I'll just keep thinking about dying. The important thing is my will.

It's my strong determination to clear all the exams and live.

With my firm decision, I don't want to use my precious 11 days just meeting a girl.

"Aww. My poor brother. Do the chicken business with mom and give it some time. When you reach your 30s, there will be lots of ladies like our sister, at a precarious age, throwing themselves at you."

"Throwing?"

I laugh together with Hyun-ji. Hyun-ji is rather exuberant and talkative and the time flew by.

After our meal, I say.

"I'll clear the table, you go in and study."

"Oh oppa. You're suddenly being too good to me and it's weird."

"Hey. You are not adjusting well to this [Olabuhni's](#) kindness.

(TN: It's how you say oppa from when there were still kings and queens. This kind of Korean was used maybe around ~500 years ago. Think Shakespearean language, but Korean.)

“Hee Hee. Thank you. I’ll be sure to pick a pretty and nice girl from my friends and introduce you.”

“[Guhlyuh.](#)”

(TN: Shakespearean Korean again. It means something like “then let it be so.”)

I too hope that such a day can come.

Hyun-ji goes inside to study. I clear the table and after I do the dishes really quickly, I start to exercise. This time, muscle exercise. After 50 pushups, my arms begin to shake. And thanks to the hike, my legs are shaking too. I’m just a mess.

But I’m in this state after just one hike. I am exasperated with myself. Will I be able to keep this up every day for 11 days?

‘Even so, I have to keep going.’

And even so, the hike today and the pushups were but simple exercise. I also have to train to use the magic gun and spirit summons during fights.

‘Alright then. I’m tired now so I’ll rest a bit. And I’ll go out at dawn when no one is around to start training.’

It’s not like I can train to use a gun and summon a spirit in front

of other people where they can see.

I don't want to be YouTube star yet. I lie down on the sofa and close my eyes.

Chapter 9 - Family (Part 2)

“Son!”

It’s a mature voice mixed with some cuteness.

When I open my eyes, mom and noona have come home. It seems noona had picked up mom on her way home.

“Mom, you’re home?”

“Yup. I heard my son came home so I closed the store early.”

I look at my watch and it’s midnight. The fried chicken business that mom runs doesn’t sell alcohol like a bar, so there’s no reason for it to be open so late.

I blatantly stare at my sister.

Kim Hyun-ju. Age 33. Occupation: [Dispute specialist lawyer](#) currently working at a large law firm.

(TN: It could mean divorce but I’m not sure.)

Her slender face with her glasses resting on her cheek is on the pretty side, but her cold eyes and lack of expression make her scary.

Anyhow, noona is holding on to a bottle of wine.

“What’s with the wine?”

“In commemoration of you no longer wasting your life.”

“ ... ”

That...that...cruel woman. This is why she has no man.

“Go get the beer from the veranda.”

“Ok.”

Inside the kimchi fridge, in the veranda, there are stacks of beer.

Noona likes the drink.

Wine and beer and the left over fried chicken that mom brought created a giant alcoholic spread.

Hyun-ji, who had been studying in her room, even slithered out and sat with us. Because when it comes to alcohol, [this kid’s eyes come around too](#). In her drunken state, mom taps me on my back and encourages me.

(TN: Meaning Hyun-ji goes crazy for alcohol as well.)

“Son! Son’s brain was just never meant for studying.”

It’s not encouraging at all.

“It’s an entrance exam and Hyun-ju did it in a year, but what about my son? It’s not like it was a law entrance exam, it was only a civil exam.”

“I’m sorry for wasting my life and money.”

“More importantly, get married. You and Hyun-ju both. What I’m saying is, someone give me a grandchild!”

At the mention of marriage, the rate of noona’s drinking quickly increased. Three or four cans in, she starts asking if there are any decent guys around.

In addition, Hyun-ji, who has also been slamming down beer, starts whining, asking if she can just play around and not get a job. She’s saying she’ll get a job after play for a couple years.

She would think up crap like this...

At a glance, it seems like I’ll be in charge of cleaning up, but all I can do is smile. Why did I not know? That just being with family could bring so much happiness.

I feel like perhaps the biggest prize to passing the first exam is

this moment right now.

The next morning.

The inside of the house was chaos. Empty beer cans and fried chicken bones were everywhere and my family members were struggling and in a daze.

High tolerance Hyun-ji sobered up first and goes to shake noona.

“Unni, you have to go to work! Wake up!”

“Ughhhh I don’t want to go to work today.”

In an expression of annoyance, she turned her back on her.

“But then you’ll get fired!”

“Then let them fire me.”

“No! If you have no man and you have no job, you’re a total loser!”

At Hyun-ji’s stabbing remark, noona shows a reaction.

After getting up with some difficulty, Hyun-ji drags noona to the bathroom. It's a tear wrenching scene.

I have just awoken and I grab my head that feels like it's about to split and let out a sigh.

‘Man. I just ended up sleeping that first night.’

Ah damn. The spirit summoning and shooting practice was the most important thing and I just forgot about it. Alcohol is indeed the enemy.

Noona dragged her tired body to work and Hyun-ji said she has a morning lecture and went off to class. And when the time comes, mom too will wake up and go to work.

I decide that I have to do the shooting and spirit practice today. Not right now, but later in the morning.

First of all, like I did yesterday, I have to hike and do pushups.

And then, all of a sudden, perhaps because I went too far, my whole body was aching. With the hangover, I wasn't in the best condition, but I washed up quickly and headed out.

Like [a dog on blessings day](#), I went up the mountain panting the whole way.

(TN: St. Francis of Assai is the patron saint of animals and ecology. October 4th is the day where there is a feast to bless your pets. It seems many churches will give a verbal blessing and use holy water on the pets to bless them.)

And with trembling arms, I barely succeeded in 50 pushups. Oh I am so lame. At least when I was in the army, my physical condition was decent.

I come home and wash up, eat lunch, and it's already 2 pm. I fill the tub with hot water and take a bath. On somewhat relaxed limbs, I put on a [muscle pain relief salve](#). I laid out my blankets in preparation for a nap. A nap when 1 minute, 1 second is so precious?

(TN: Something similar to tiger balm.)

It's because the spirit summoning and shooting practice have to be done at dawn, when there are no people.

In order to best use my time efficiently, I change the schedule and decided to sleep in the afternoon.

After a brief sleep, it's already 8 pm.

“Hee hee. Unemployed oppa, you up?”

Hyun-ji, who had returned from school, was teasing my disheveled waking face.

Now that I think of it, in her eyes, I must have seemed like nothing more than an unemployed oppa and therefore took a nap.

“It’s because I worked out so hard earlier.”

“Worked out?”

“A hike. I’m going to do it every day.”

“Bleckk. An early morning hike? Oppa’s is totally acting like an unemployed person.”

“My dear younger sister, how is it that every time I talk to you it makes me angry. You want to get hit by oppa?”

“Hahahaha. Anyway. Why are you exercising all of a sudden? You’re already so skinny it can’t be for a diet.”

“To survive in the intense fried chicken work, I have to work on my fitness first.”

At my words, Hyun-ji bursts out in laughter.

We make a simple dinner out of the seaweed soup and side dishes from yesterday. We clear the table, do the dishes, and get the cleaning done. And even then, there are many hours left until midnight, so I take out the laptop.

What I search for on the web is survival skills for how to survive in a forest or mountain wilderness. I research gun shooting positions and shootout strategies. I took notes on any useful information and studied.

‘You idiot, you should’ve studied this hard to begin with.’

What the baby angel with the dangling bbundegi said was right. If I had studied like life or death as on the line before, I would have passed the civil exam. A life where every time I look at my life I’m full of regret is just proof that I was living wrong.

Well. I’ve already done a lot of regretting. Let’s stop now.

And so the time passed until midnight.

‘There’s probably no one on the mountain on this hour?’

I changed my clothes and head out.

The training location will be where I do my every day hikes, Taejo Mountain. There will be no people at night and I took notice of a field during the day.

It’s a little embarrassing to say as an adult nearing 30, but it’s very unsettling to be walking on the street at night all alone.

There are people that set up tents and camp at the Mount Taejo Park, but the mountain pass I'm headed to is devoid of people.

'Ahh. I'm afraid a ghost might pop out.'

You're probably wondering, a 30 year old man and a ghost? I didn't used to believe in these things either, but after dying once, my thoughts have changed. Baby angels exist, so why not a ghost.

'Ah. What about Sylph?'

I immediately call for Sylph.

-Meow.

The summoned Sylph rubs herself against my face is being cute. Looking at cute Sylph dissipates all my fears.

Hold on. Wasn't Sylph's summon time only 2 hours?

"Skill Review."

-Spirit summon (Main skill). Lower level wind spirit is currently summoned.

*Level 1: Summons period 2 hours (Remaining time: 1 hour 59 minutes.)

When the summon time is up, you may re-summon in 10 hours.

So 2 hours was correct. If I used Sylph's powers, the time limit will decrease faster.

'Because of the time limit, I guess I won't be able to do a lot of spirit summon training.'

It seems I will have to spare the summoning time as much as I can.

I speak to Sylph as I pet her.

"Sylph, I'll call you in a little while. So go away for now?"

-Meow.

Sylph let out a soft reply and, as if a mirage, disappears.

I was once again left all alone on the mountain road in the dead of night.

Damn it. What's there to be scared about? I am guy that, in 10

days, will have to fight to the death.

With that thought in mind, without any more trepidation, I marched on.

It's because there is no probably as serious as an exam with my life on the line. After 10 more minutes of hiking, I find the field I had taken note of earlier.

It was field wrapped in tightly packed trees that almost made a canopy.

‘Let's do this.’

First is shooting practice.

“Weapon, equip.”

In my right hand was the magic gun and around my waist was the bandolier. The amount of bullets in the belt numbered exactly 100.

The shooting practice should be...

‘Huh?’

My eyes widened at the sudden truth.

‘This is crazy. Plenty my ass. This isn’t enough.’

The lead bullets are an expendable item. If I use them during training, replenishing them is impossible.

And then I think, well maybe after shooting practice, I can pick them up and use them again. I can just have Sylph pick up all the shot bullets. But then I think the material of the bullet is lead. When it reaches its target, it’ll receive a strong force and the shape will crumble!

“Board retrieval!”

The board appeared in midair.

“How many bullets are there?”

Lead bullets 100: bullets made with a lead material to be used with a gun (-2)

-Remaining karma: 0

Luckily, it is possible to get 100 bullets at the price of 2 karma. Unfortunately, the karma I have left is 0.

It is the result of carefully not leaving any of my exam winning karma.

... Careful my ass. I hadn't thought about getting more bullets.

“You idiot. Now what are you going to do!”

I collapse into a sitting position onto the floor.

And so shooting practice because a stretch.

And there was no benefit for me having come out in the dead of night for training.

‘The 100 bullets I do have need to be used at the 2nd exam.

I do not know how the 2nd exam will be. If it's something like one of the red ape from the first exam, it'll be fine. But it could be crawling with 10 of them. I have to spare as many of my expendable bullets as I can.

Didn't they say that in the Vietnam War that every soldier, to kill one person, used 50,000 bullets?

‘No. My gun is not an automatic anyway so it can't just expend them like that.’

Thus, unlike an automatic gun that just sprays, I have to carefully aim and shoot every single time.

‘But if that’s the case, I have to increase my marksmanship through training!’

I have to somehow do my shooting training. I can’t step into the exam without ever having shot it. I take my smart phone out of my pocket. I open the internet browser and search for bullets. I’m trying to find marble shaped bullets that are the same as my lead ones.

“It’s here!”

Out of joy, I shouted without even realizing. On the internet shopping mall, they are selling sling bullets that you use for slingshots made of steel. Round marbles, their sizes come in 7mm, 8mm, 9mm and many more.

Using an app on my phone, I measure the size of my lead bullets. The size of the lead bullets for the magic gun is exactly 10 mm and the shopping mall is currently selling 10 mm slingshot bullets. I immediately order 500.

I desperately wish they will get here soon.

I only have 10 days.

I am somewhat relieved to have solved the shooting problem

bullets problem.

Chapter 10 - Training

‘Well I’m already here so I might as well try shooting like 5 bullets. The lead bullets that I will use for the exam and the steel material slingshot bullets that I just ordered are of different weights. I have to become familiar with the feeling of shooting the lead bullets.

‘Let’s shoot.’

I take out a single lead bullet and put it into the chamber. And then I aim at a pine tree about 20 meters off.

‘I thought it would be uncomfortable, but loading the gun is pretty easy. You just put the bullet in the chamber and that’s it. Very simple. The modern era rifles had to hand pack gunpowder and poke it in with a stick and all this stuff. But this uses a magically shot lead bullet and not gunpowder so it was very simple.

I squat down in the ‘sit and shoot’ position and put the butt of the gun against my shoulder.

I adjust the two sights, look down the gun, and aim. I stop my breathing and then, shoot.

Toong-

And with the small sound, a heavy recoil was felt on my

shoulder.

[Pajik!](#)

(Tree bark breaking sound)

And the bark on the pine tree that was hit with the lead bullet got blown off.

‘The recoil on this is a lot weaker than the K2 I used in the army. I suppose that means the power is a lot weaker too.’

Of course there are advantages to this.

‘Because the gun is light and the recoil is small, even without getting into the proper position, shooting should be easier. Even the sound is small. Because it is not a gunpowder gun, it doesn’t make a loud noise either’

I get close and examine the pine tree to investigate. The impression of where the tree was hit was dug out.

If it’s this much, it should have enough power to kill.

If I aim correctly, it’s enough to kill the red ape in one shot.

“Sylph”

-Meow

I speak to the summoned Sylph.

“Pick up the bullet that I just shot.”

-Meow

Sylph quickly vanished about into the air and came back with the lead bullet in her mouth and placed it in my palm.

“Ahh of course...”

As predicted, the lead bullet was completely crumpled up. Re-using them was impossible. I definitely have to become a one shot, one kill sniper.

I step a little further away from my target pine tree.

Toong.

This time it didn't land on the pine tree.

“Go pick it up Sylph.”

Sylph brings me the lead bullet I shot. This time, luckily, the shape of the lead bullet was fine. Seeing as how there is a lot of dirt

on it, it seems it had landed on the ground.

‘Thank god. Every single shot is precious.’

“Sylph. Do you perhaps know the distance between here and the pine tree over there?”

-Meow?

Sylph shakes her head.

‘Aww. Sylph doesn’t understand meters.’

I pull out my smart phone and show Sylph the measurement app on my phone.

“Here. This is 1 centimeter and 100 centimeters is 1 meter. Get it now?”

-Meow!

With a confident reply, Sylph marked a number in the ground.

41.

Damn. It’s only 41 meters and I couldn’t hit it. I couldn’t hit that

giant pine tree?

‘My aim is not very good.’

Then again, the K2 gun that I used in the army was a modern weapon that had been advanced with science. On the other hand, the magic gun that I have, at first glance, is very old school. The bullets are a round marble shape. So of course the accuracy is iffy.

I have to one shot, one kill, but the accuracy of this gun makes that a problem. The only thing left to trust now is Sylph.

“Sylph.”

-Meow?

“If I shoot the gun, can you use your power to make sure it hits the tree?”

-Meow

Sylph nods her head.

“Alright. Then I’ll just kind of shoot and you use your power to make the lead bullet hit the pine tree. Exactly where it had hit before.”

-Meow!

“Ok. I’m going to shoot.”

I placed a lead bullet into the chamber and I thoughtfully get into position. Without carefully aiming down the sights, I pull on the trigger right away.

Toong!

At the same time as the bullet came out, Sylph flew.

Puk! (Bam)

From the pine tree came another heavy sound that echoed. It hit its mark.

I ran up and checked the pine tree. Surprisingly, the bullet mark had imprinted right in the place where the first bullet had hit.

“We did it!”

About this much and that’s really good accuracy. Going forward, if I can use Sylph’s help like this, I’ll be 100 for 100. The next problem is how much of Sylph’s power was used for that shooting.

“Skill Review.”

-Spirit summon (Main skill). Lower level wind spirit is currently summoned.

*Level 1: Summons period 2 hours (Remaining time: 1 hour 29 minutes.)

When the summon time is up, you may re-summon in 10 hours.

The remaining summoning time has decreased by a lot so I ask Sylph.

“Sylph, how many minutes has it been since I’ve summoned you?”

Sylph marks the ground.

17.

That means using Sylph’s power reduced the time by 14 minutes! I’ve used too much of Sylph’s power.

‘Perhaps this is a given?’

The lead bullet that came out of the gun had flown out with

extreme speed and power. It makes sense that using wind to alter the path of the powerfully shot bullet used a lot of power.

And on top of that, the distance is only 41 meters. If the length had been further, and Sylph had only used a small amount of power, the direction would have been greatly changed, however, having to move the lead bullet in a shorter distance means more power had to be used.

‘If there are only 1 or 2 creatures to fight, then this will be enough...’

Once shot is 14 minutes. Which just 8 shots, Sylph’s summon time will be up.

In a situation with multiple enemies, it isn’t that useable of a skill.

Once the summons period is over, I have to wait 10 hours to summon again, and this skill has too large a penalty.

“Is there no other way?”

I sit down and rest and go deep into thought.

The magic gun’s accuracy is not very high. How am I to fight when I can’t properly hit a large pine tree that is just 41 meters away? Sylph’s power is crucial. With no good thoughts coming to mind, I lift up the magic gun.

In my sitting position, I put a lead bullet into the chamber and aim at the pine tree.

-Meow

Sylph sat, stuck right next to me, and casually swept her tail back and forth.

Now that I think of it, a sniper always has a spotter next to them, no?

It was as if I was a sniper and Sylph was my spotter. But I'm sure there isn't a spotter in the world that's as cute as this one.

"Sylph, if I shoot like this, do you think it'll hit the pine tree?"

-Meow

Sylph nods her head.

"Do you think I'll be able to hit the spot from the first bullet?"

This time, she shakes her head back and forth.

"Then?"

Sylph flies in front of me and with her adorable front paw, moves the barrel very slightly left.

“It’ll work if I shoot like this?”

-Meow

Sylph nods her head.

‘Alright. So should we give it a go?’

In order not to deviate from the aim that Sylph had set, [I monitor my heartbeat and concentrate](#). Without the slightest movement, I hold my breath, and then I delicately pull the trigger.

(TN: Literally says ‘I tame my cardiovascular and concentrate.’ But I’m fairly certain he was trying to shoot between his heartbeats so the twitching doesn’t affect his aim.)

Toong-Pajik!

It shot the pine tree. As if out of happiness, Sylph was flying in circles around my head.

I run up and check out the pine tree.

“WOW!”

The dip from the first shot was even more dug out.

“This is exactly it!”

A way to use a very small amount of Sylph’s power and still shoot 100 out of 100!

“Sylph. This time, I’m going to close my eyes and shoot. The moment I pull the trigger, you adjust the barrel of the gun.”

-Meow

Far away from the pine tree, I put a lead bullet into the gun and close my eyes. I lift the gun and point in the general direction.

The moment I pull the trigger, I can feel Sylph slightly moving the barrel.

Toong-Puk!

I check and again, it’s a bull’s eye. Up till now, there is only one bullet mark in the tree. It means all my bullets have been hitting the same spot! I’ve also reduced the use of Sylph’s power.

It isn’t right to change the direction of the shot lead bullet. Just moving the barrel a small amount before shooting the gun does not use a lot of power. This is the answer.

There is no real reason for me to do the aiming!

“Let’s do it again!”

“Meow!”

This time, holding the gun in my hands, I run at full speed.

While running, I take out a lead bullet and put it in the barrel.

“Let’s go!”

With all my power, I jump and in midair, I turn my body and point the gun in the direction of the pine tree.

Of course, it is an awful aim, but I pull the trigger.

At that moment, Sylph accurately moves the barrel

Toong-Pajik!

Bull’s eye!

“Good!”

I raise my fists and celebrate.

And so I will be able to get 100 out of 100 no matter which way I shoot. Sylph and the gun is the best possible combination. It was like a match made in heaven.

Chapter 11 - To The Arena Again (Part 1)

As the time of the second exam gets shorter, it feels as if my heart is clenching and I can feel the anxiety. However, my heart is stronger than the first day. It is due to the result of my training.

On the first day of training, spirit summoning, and shooting training, I gained the best method by using Sylph in the shooting. Just have Sylph be in charge of the aiming.

The wind spirit, Sylph, knows how to aim the gun and perfectly hit the target.

And so the moment I pull the trigger, Sylph will be responsible for the tiny adjustments by moving the barrel.

100 out of 100!

In extreme terms, with Sylph's help, I can shoot better than a special ops veteran army sniper.

I mean, no matter how I shoot, it shoots as if I've done all the tiny adjustments already.

‘It was really good that I picked the spirit summon as the main skill.’

I feel secure in my decision that was easy to make to begin with.

You can only select one main skill and you cannot change it.

The main skill, which I have chosen but once, will, in the future, be in all my exams. Thus determining my fighting style and be the most important aspect to it all.

First of all, I think that I have at least buttoned my first button well. But I cannot be so optimistic. My method of having chosen the gun as my weapon leaves my close combat weak.

When a red ape like creature is in front of my face with a stone hatchet, attacking me, how will I have the time to load a gun and shoot?

‘The best thing is to just not be in close combat range at all.’

I must act stealthily and not get caught by the enemy. But will that be possible? Let’s think back on the first exam.

Location was a forest. The enemy was the red ape that resides there. It was a bastard that was no different than a wild animal that was very familiar with the forest.

To avoid that kind of creature catching onto me whilst I secretly roam about is impossible. Like the first exam, the enemy will probably discover me first and wait for the opportunity to attack.

‘If I knew this would happen, I would’ve become a navy seal instead. Who would’ve thought I’d ever be in this position?’

The skills that I had collected in the 2 years of being in the rear troops are of no use to me now.

‘There’s no other way. I have to use Sylph very carefully.’

I summon Sylph and ask.

“Sylph. Listen carefully.”

-Meow?

Sylph tilted her face up at me as if to concentrate better on my words.

Aww you cute thing!

“Let’s pretend that you are sitting up on my shoulders.”

-Meow

Sylph actually jumps delicately onto my right shoulder.

Feeling her tail swoosh and wrap around my neck I say.

“And then, from somewhere, a bad bastard creeps up in order to

kill me. Before he gets to me, are you able to tell that he is getting closer?”

-Meow!

Sylph nods her head up and down.

“How close does it have to get for you to be able to tell?”

Sylph jumps off my shoulder and spins around like lightning.

Sylph’s afterimage draws out the number 200.

“200 meters? You can tell where all the approaching enemies are within 200 meters?”

Impressive. If Sylph had been there for the first exam, would the red ape have been found out right away?

“Alright then, how about this? We have come into a very dangerous zone, and in order to discern what is around me, I send you out to scout. How much area could you scout?”

This time Sylph draws out 900.

“900 meters? You can be 900 meters away from me?”

-Meow

Sylph nods her face.

“So you’re saying you can’t be more than 900 meters away from me?”

-Meow

“Ok. If my spirit summon level increases, then it’s possible to increase this distance?”

-Meow

Nod nod.

After that, Sylph and I chatted and experimented this and that and learned a great deal about spirit summons.

First. Even if I send out Sylph to scout, the summon time does not decrease. Scouting does not use much strength.

Secondly, however, the further Sylph gets from me, the weaker her powers are. And the closer she is to me, the stronger her powers become.

Thirdly. After using up all the time, in 10 hours, the time

completely refills. Sylph's summon time is 2 hours. What this means is that every 5 minutes, 1 minute will recover.

We experimented in real life. After using up all the summon time, 5 minutes later I call on Sylph again.

Sylph was summoned for 1 minute, and disappeared once more.

‘Ok. The most important probably has been deciphered.’

Inspecting. Scouting. Shooting. I am relying on Sylph a lot.

North, South, East, West. Sylph even will tell me what direction I am facing.

And so the 2 hour summon time is a detrimental weakness to me, but there is a way to recover the summoning time. I will just call on Sylph only when I need her. There is no choice but to in a fight. But in other instances, I just have to call on her once every 5 minutes. She will leave after 60 seconds, then be re-summoned in 5 minutes. I have to be with Sylph in order not to be attacked and that is how this idea was born.

If I am attacked in the 5 minutes where Sylph is not summoned, the situation gets complicated, but that chances of that are not high.

In the 60 seconds she is summoned, I will have her scout as well.

And so, after thinking of many different scenarios, I prepare myself for the 2nd exam. Every morning, I go on the hike and do pushups.

And even this exercise, after 5 days, was not as hard as it was on the 1st day. I think that even in a short time, consistency really pays off.

However, all of my diligent preparation was met with a big barrier. That barrier is...

“SON~!”

Mom abruptly comes into my room. In my complete surprise, I close the laptop where I had been taking notes on this and that regarding the exam.

“Uh. Hey mom?”

“Oh son, what are you quickly covering up?”

“Oh, it’s nothing.”

And then mom let out an all knowing sigh.

“Son son you are not in your adolescence anymore and you are almost 30...”

“What a misconception! Mom, this isn’t the situation that you think it is...!”

“I know I know. I’m sorry I came in without knocking son.”

“Agh you know what...never mind. Anyway, what are you doing not at work yet?”

“Son should come with me to work.”

“Why would I go to the store? You have dementia already?”

“Oh son, what pretty words.”

I shamelessly shrug it off. But I feel that what is finally expected to come is coming to pass.

The son who spent years studying for the civil exam and is now almost 30, has given up and returned home, is sitting around doing nothing. Mom is anxious, day by day, to drag me into the world of fried chicken.

However, the rest period left for me is only 5 days. I do not want what could possibly be the last 5 days of my life to be spent frying chicken.

“Mom knows you haven’t been back for that long, so I want to let

you rest for a while. But [ajumma](#) Ye-rim says she's sick and can't come to work today."

(TN: Ajumma is a respectful term for a middle aged woman.)

Ugh. She's cornering me into a situation with no escape! Think about it. A way to slip out of this situation...

At that moment, a light bulb goes off in my head.

"Mom, the lady that works with you starting this year is supposed to work 4 days a week and the other days, weren't you going to hire a part time worker? I thought I heard that the lady wanted to shrink her hours because she's 60 this year."

"Oh. Oh my. You remember that son?"

Mom is flustered.

"Of course I remember. You heard the rate for part time hiring at the store is 6000 won (roughly \$6 USD) and lamented to me how that was better than what I was making!"

"You should've studied with that kind of memory."

My thoughts exactly.

Like the bbundegi bastard angel said, now that my life is in danger, my head spins round and round.

“Anyway, starting next month, I’ll go out to the store and work too. Let it slide for now? At least while I’m home, I do the cleaning and the laundry.”

“That’s true. Since you’ve been home, the house has been clean. I don’t even see any hair in the bathroom strainer.”

“You see? I (Sylph) clean so well.”

“Alright. I’ll let it slide. But starting next month, if you don’t work, you don’t get an allowance. Ok son?”

“Yes ma’am.”

Mom leaves for work and I let out a deep sigh.

I have lots to do in preparation for my exam.

Chapter 12 - To The Arena again (Part 2)

The time flew by quickly.

-Name: Kim Hyun-ho

-Class: 3

-Karma: 0

-Mission: Rest until the next exam

-Time limit: 11 hours

“I’m going to go crazy.”

I feel like I’m going to lose my mind from the anxiety. I’ll fall asleep tonight and I’ll be called to the Arena to fight.

I’m so scared. Will I be able to survive?

After spending 10 days with family, my will to survive has grown even more.

Mom. Noona. Hyun-ji.

It wrenches my guts to think of mom, noona, and Hyun-ji leaning over my dead body and crying.

‘I will live. I can live. Kim Hyun-ho.’

I forcefully hypnotize myself and set out from the house.

Today, I have to do some shopping.

I go to the nearby outlet shopping mall. The reason I come here is to buy clothes to wear for my second exam.

I think back to the first exam. I floundered about in the forest in my underwear. And the lesson that I can learn from that is that you get called to the exam in whatever clothes you are wearing when you fall asleep.

So then what happens if I wear a full outfit and fall asleep with my shoes on? With that train of thought, shoes and clothes are important preparation. I have come here to buy combat attire now.

‘My army clothes are in the closet, but even if I die, I really don’t want to wear those again.’

If I die in the 2nd exam, my body will be found in my army gear. It’ll be so pathetic to die wearing army gear on top of dying at a

young age.

I buy some shoes first. I picked trekking shoes that are suitable for multiple environments and are also waterproof. The price was a bit crazy, but I close my eyes and bought them.

For pants, I picked cargo pants with lots of pockets. I thought of tough jeans or sweats that would be comfortable to work in, but the perk of many pockets is the most important.

‘Oh. Should I buy some gloves and a hat too?’

Gloves for protecting my hands and a hat for protecting my head.

It is good to take whatever I can and all of it.

I return home and its already evening. The remaining time is only 3 hours.

I look over all my gear to check if I have forgotten anything. I sit down at my desk, pull out a pen and paper, and begin to write.

[To my loving family.]

It is in case I do not come back alive. I write about how much I love my family. I wanted to write it simply, but at the thought that this is the last goodbye, the words keep getting longer. The tears well up in my eyes. I cannot stop them so I cover my mouth and

cry quietly. I put the letter in my drawer and prepared to go to sleep.

I put on three pairs of underwear and three pairs of socks. It is possible that the exam lasts for a couple of days.

The new pants and shoes. A shirt with a sweater on top and over that, an outdoor jacket.

‘This all makes me feel like a person about to go on a hike.’

I think maybe, and shove a Swiss army knife and lighter, a small pair of binoculars, a smart phone, and a bag of candy into my pockets.

‘I probably can’t take these items with me?’

Amongst the karma prizes, there was a ‘turn an object into an item’ option. So if I don’t use karma to turn things into items, I won’t be able to take them with me. However, you never know, so I pack them anyway. Because you never know.

‘Mom. I’ll be back.’

I turn off the lights and lay in my bed.

Darn...I'm so nervous, sleep does not come to me. It's also because I've worn this and that and I'm very uncomfortable. I usually sleep naked.

“Board retrieval.”

-Name: Kim Hyun-ho

-Class: 3

-Karma: 0

-Mission: Rest until the next exam

-Time limit: 27 minutes 41 seconds

“Damn. Time sure does pass by.”

I let out a scoffing laugh. I have never felt that life was so precious.

With my eyes open, I look at the time limit changing, 1 second at a time, on the board.

After the 27 minutes, the final countdown begins.

5 seconds, 4 seconds, 3...2...1...

At the same time it turns to 0, my consciousness becomes hazy.

Definitely, as expected, it is a system that when the time comes, you automatically fall asleep

“Welcome! Aren’t you glad to see me again?”

The baby angel always obnoxiously greets me.

“I’d be more welcome if you would put on some underwear. What is there to boast about that you leave it out to dangle like that?”

“Aww. I even gave you a special privilege and you diss me as soon as you see my face? I’m hurt.”

“A special privilege?”

“I gave you a special service because I approved of the fervor of which you prepared for the exam.”

“What service?”

“Look around for yourself.”

And then I finally see my appearance.

First of all, the training shoes, two gloves, hat, everything was as I had fallen asleep in.

“Yup. You come in the way you are dressed.”

“Yes. You may use what you wear, including your shoes. Other things, you cannot.”

And now that I look again, I don't see my wristwatch. And then I look in my pockets, and the lighter and Swiss army knife that I had packed, are not there. But the bag of candy I had put in my cargo pants is.

“Your service is a single bag of candy?”

“Yes. It is only special this one time. Aren't you thankful?”

“Yeah. Real thankful. You want one?”

“Yes.”

The baby angel put out his two hands toward me.

I rip open the bag and give him a piece.

“How is it? This much preparation and I would say it’s a 100 out of 100.”

“I’ll give you a 98. You have done the best you could to prepare on your own.”

“Well what’s the missing 2%?”

“What do you think?”

This bastard...

The baby angel gleefully speaks.

“If you can guess it, I’ll give you 2 karma. Ok. Time limit 60 seconds. Start.”

I am startled by the sudden quiz. 2 karma is the price of 100 bullets.

What is it? What did I miss?

I think hard. I squeeze my brain and an answer doesn’t come to mind.

‘Hold on. Didn’t that bastard just say it? That I have done everything I could to prepare on my own?’

And the answer suddenly comes to mind.

“Damn it.”

Without realizing it, I swear. It’s the result of my own regret.

“Have you discovered it?”

I grind my teeth and reply.

“...I was unable to meet another examinee.”

“Correct! 2 karma will be given to examinee Kim Hyun-ho. You must be happy?”

“Happy? My ass I’m happy!”

I had forgotten about such an important aspect. And there were plenty of hints!

‘I say again, but examinee Kim Hyun-ho received a really great grade in your first exam.’

‘Normally, examinees cannot do like Kim Hyun-ho has.’

The baby angel had not forthrightly hidden the fact that there are other examinees like me. But I had not realized as such. The very first thing that I should’ve done would have been to find and meet other examinees and receive information and tips.

“Hold on. Can I go around talking about the exam and the Arena and it doesn’t matter?”

“It doesn’t matter. You could do tricks with Sylph and become a YouTube star and it wouldn’t matter.”

“...”

Towards my frowning face, the baby angel pats me on the shoulder.

“C’mon now. Didn’t you just get 2 karma for free? And you have a bag of candy.”

“Can I use the 2 karma now?”

“Go ahead.”

I call on the board and with the karma prize, I obtain 100 bullets. It is a relief that I have been able to get more bullets.

“Ok. If all your preparations are done, shall we find out a bit more about the 2nd exam?”

“It’s not like before where you don’t tell me anything and just drop me into it?”

“Hee hee. I, too, enjoy examinee Kim Hyun-ho’s endless pondering, [riding the poop rope](#).”

(TN: According to Gampa in the comments: “Riding the poop rope” actually means “the poop rope is burning.” Basically imagine there’s a rope that’s connected to your ass(hole) that’s burning like a fuse. You would be panicking and running around like a chicken with it’s head cut off, right? (just like our dear mc here)))

My fists cry.

Can I use the karma prize and just slap this bastard on the cheek once?

“My face slaps are expensive.”

“ ... ”

The baby angel read my mind.

“Anyway, the first exam was just a warm up. And starting at the 2nd exam, it’s the real deal.”

As so we returned to real talk. I tense up and concentrate on the baby angel's words. I cannot lose a single word. Any passing word can become a hint.

“Starting now, you will carry out the exam with another examinee.”

“Another examinee?”

So that's why he gave me that quiz.

“How many people?”

“Apart from examinee Kim Hyun-ho, 4 other people.”

“What kind of people?”

“Look for yourself. They're right next to you.”

“Who's next to m-OOHHHH!”

I'm completely taken by surprise, I'm not alone.

“Gakk!”

“Wakk! Fuck, what is this!”

“What?!”

“.....”

The other people around me all yell in surprise. The space where only the angel and I stood is occupied suddenly by four more people!

With surprise in our eyes, we stare at each other.

A girl, in her 20's, in sweats and tennis shoes.

A man, who seems about 40, with an angry expression and a big build.

A young guy about college age.

And a guy, about mid 30's, with a cold expression on his face.

After looking at the four people, I return my gaze to the baby angel.

The baby angel clapped his hands together.

“Now now, pay attention. You are all examinees who have just finished your first exam. There are those with impressive marks,

those with so-so average marks, and those who cause grave concern. Regardless, from now on, you will be going through the exam together so good luck.”

With a flick of his finger, the exam door appeared.

“Hey, you rat shit sparrow bastard! You ought to explain a bit about the exam!”

The 40 year old man yelled out.

The baby angel made a happy smile.

“But I don’t want to?”

“Why this arrogant bastard...!”

“You want to get hit with lightning again?”

The angry man twitches. It seems he was also hit with lightning before.

Perhaps it is from his nasty speech and reckless behavior, but I get the feeling he is a thug. His expression is such and he doesn’t seem the type to get along with others.

‘Will it be okay? I don’t know if it will go well being teamed up

with this person.'

I don't think I am the only one thinking this kind of thought.

The girl in her 20's and the college guy are both staring with nervous eyes at the angry looking, middle-aged man.

Only the man in his 30's, with the cold unchanging expression, looks on without a blink.

Now is not the time for this. First I must verify what the exam is.

"Board retrieval."

I retrieve my board.

As I do so, the others follow suit and say 'board retrieval'. And for real, their boards were not visible.

-Name: Kim Hyun-ho

-Class: 3

-Karma: 0

-Mission: survive until the time limit

-Time limit: 7 days

“One, one week?”

“Survive?”

The girl and college student are surprised.

“Hey sparrow! All it is, is holding onto my breath for a week?”

The thuggish man asked the baby angel. The baby angel nodded his head and replied.

“That is correct. You’re annoying, so go on your way or I will hit with lightning. 1, 2, 3, 4...”

“Oh fuck! I’ll go, geez, I’m going!”

Perhaps due to his fear of the lightning, the thuggish man opened the mission door first and left.

After him, we took our turns passing through the mission door.

Chapter 13 - To The Arena Again (Part 3)

Like the first exam, it's a forest.

“[Eh Nimi](#), it's the forest again.”

(TN: I have no idea what that is. It might be a typo by the author. I think he was trying to say 'boss' but I really don't know.)

The thuggish guy mumbled.

We were all lost, looking around at our surroundings. I too, felt a strange energy looking around the forest's environment; it wasn't new.

Everyone stood where they were and continued to stare and so I picked up my courage and spoke.

“So was everyone's first exam the red ape?”

“Yes.”

“Correct.”

The girl in her 20's and the college kid spoke.

“What? So all of you had to fight that fricking monkey too?” asked the thuggish guy.

Instead of an answer, I just nodded my head up and down. It didn't feel nice that he was using [informal speech](#) at the get go.

(TN: In Korea, you usually use formal speech when first meeting people and progress to informal speech when you become friends.)

“So it's that forest from then.”

The 30 year old guy, that hadn't said a single word, spoke for the first time.

The girl and the college kid nodded.

So it is. This is the forest from the first exam.

“So I guess that means that this forest is the location where 5 red apes died?”

“I suppose so,” replied the college student.

“Then doesn't that possibly mean that this exam, in addition to red apes, the mission is to survive for a week?”

At my words, the thuggish guy lets out a big grin.

“What. It's not like that monkey thing was scary anyway. You just have to beat them to death as they appear.”

“It’s possible that tens or hundreds might come in bunches.”

“How would you know that, bastard?”

Ok. I really don’t like this [ajusshi](#).

(TN: Respectful term for middle aged men.)

“Monkeys and primates live in communities. The red apes live in communities and of those if five of them died here, might not their comrades come here for revenge?”

“....”

The thuggish guy had nothing to say to that so I continued to speak.

“So far that is only a speculation but nonetheless, I think we should stop standing here and move. We have to get water and food as well.”

“That makes sense.”

The college student agreed.

“I think so too.” The girl agreed in a cautious voice.

Indeed these two people have good cooperation. The problem is the thuggish delinquent ajusshi and the cold, wordless 30 year old guy.

“Well, since we have to find a safe place to stay put for a week anyway.”

The embarrassed thug middle aged man spoke and briskly walked forward, setting the way. He even just decides which direction to go in all on his own.

I get the uneasy feeling that as time goes on, this man will cause us problems.

But for now, there is no other way.

I follow in behind him and the others begin to follow suit.

“Ah, fuck, no cigarettes.”

The thug middle aged man dug through his pockets and mumbled. Walking a few steps and mumbled, another few steps and more mumbling. The thug man made us uncomfortable with his continuous swearing.

‘I wonder what all these people picked with their karma prize?’

I am most curious about that.

The fighting style will change according to what skills and weapons we have.

We have to know what each other's fighting style is in order to synchronize/complement each other.

‘Now that I think of it, didn't the angel say this?’

‘There are those here with great grades, modest so-so grades, and those with grave cause for concern.’

We are 5 people.

So, I can guess that there are two with great grades, two people with modest grades, and the remaining one person with a bad grade.

The bad grade was probably received by the 20 year old girl. Because, well, she's a girl.

Then there are two with great grades. I am sure one of the two is me. So then who is the other?

‘I don't think it's the college student, but you never know. A guy like me got a good grade so I can't judge by just by appearances.’

At the least it's probably not the thuggish man. Because he's too

stupid.

Should I ask? What their skills and weapons are?

I was pondering these things at the time.

“I am Park Go-chan.”

The one who opened his mouth was the thuggish man.

“You mention Park Go-chan on the Gangnam night streets and nobody doesn’t know me.”

He’s definitely a thug.

“Spent 20 years on those streets and there are more than 10 people who met their fates with my hands. Unlike you guys, I am familiar with this kind of thing. So you all just trust me and follow me and you’ll be good.”

This chattering Park Go-chan suddenly put his hand on the shoulder of the 20 year old girl that had been walking behind him.

“Got it, miss?”

“Wha-what are you doing.”

The girl got flustered and brushed off Park Go-chan's hand.

Park Go-chan brazenly grabbed her shoulder again and swooshed her into his arms and spoke.

“Miss, I know what you're thinking. You are scared to be in this situation? I will protect you from now on. How's that? Thankful?”

“Let, let go please.”

Paling in the daylight, the girl in a shaky and sad voice resisted.

The college guy, not knowing what to do just stared.

I feel the same.

Starting from a while ago, the passive behavior Park Go-chan began revealing his true nature.

This place, the Arena, does not have any laws to protect us, and Park Go-chan, having started to reveal his true nature, is bound to enact tyranny.

And when that time comes, it is clear without seeing what will happen to the girl.

‘It cannot be.’

I, too, am fearful of this Park Go-chan who says he was a gangster, but I can't turn a blind eye to this behavior.

I have to continue taking the exam with that girl and if I don't act now, I am approving of this Park Go-chan's behavior.

I take the girl away from Park Go-chan and speak.

“Um, she is uncomfortable so let's not do this...”

Puck!

(Hitting sound)

I collapse, sitting onto the ground I grab my left cheek and moan.

“You fucking bastard. Who are you treating like shit? Tiny fucker!”

Puck!

Park Go-chan kicks me in the side.

“Kuk!”

The air got knocked out of me. I grip my side and roll on the floor.

With the pain, the feeling of injustice comes flooding in. Why do I have to get hit by a shit like this? He thinks I'm weaker than him so he fearlessly throws his violence at me.

‘Should I summon Sylph? Should I threaten him with the gun?’

These thoughts race by my mind.

“I didn't like you from the beginning. Trailing little bastard pretending to know shit and yammering on with your mouth.”

Park Go-chan is threatening to establish his power in the group. What kind of immature high school behavior is this?

He will probably assert his power and then boss the others around like servants.

“[Huk huk huk...](#)”

(Crying/weeping sound)

As the situation explodes into violence, the girl begins to weep.

To get beaten to a pulp in front of a girl! It really hurts my pride. Based on my thoughts, all I want to do is call Sylph to pull out this thug bastard's throat or shoot him with the gun.

“Please, please don’t fight.”

The young guy who looks to be in college steps up. But all it does is catch the mean eyes of Park Go-chan.

“And what are you, you shit.”

“I, I am...”

“Equip.”

In Park Go-chan’s right hand appeared a sword. Having seen the blue tint blade, the alarmed college student takes a few steps back.

“What, what are you doing?!”

“Might as well do this now, let’s arrange a pecking order. Anyone with a problem with me, come on out.”

It became as quiet as a dead mouse. Of course, the girl and the college student also became like chicks eating honey.

‘He wants to establish a hierarchy by fighting? Is this guy crazy?’

Whether we like or hate each other, in order to survive, we have to be cooperating comrades and he wants to fight?

At first thought, I want to summon Sylph and my gun and intimidate him too.

But this guy is a thug.

Even if the fight were to become a stalemate, I don't know what kind of vengeance he may carry afterwards.

On top of that, his head will be full of thoughts on messing with the girl. A man who has gone crazy with sexual desire will fail to keep his anger in check.

Perhaps because he thinks he has completely controlled us, Park Go-chan turns his attention to the response-less 30 year old guy.

“Hey, guy.”

“ ... ”

The 30 year old guy shows no response. But he is expressionless without looking at anything. He doesn't appear at all to be intimidated by Park Go-chan.

“What about you? You got a problem with me?”

“ ... ”

“Fuck, give me an answer!”

You can cut the atmosphere with a knife.

The 30 year old guy shows no response or fear. And now due to pride, Park Go-chan can't back down. Park Go-chan approaches the guy and shoves his face close.

“Why no reply? Are you a mute? Pissed your pants? If you can't answer at least nod your head.”

If he nods, it seems it will be taken as a sign of surrender and this will all be over. Even Park Go-chan doesn't want this to go to a fight.

And then at that moment.

Schwick!

The guys' right hand moves like lightning and smacks Park Go-chan in the face. His pointer and middle finger are resting atop Park Go-chan's eyes.

“What, fuck what is this!”

The startled Park Go-chan flails his arms and backs up.

“Fishing out eyeballs with fingers is very easy.”

Finally, from the guy’s heavy lips, came forth creepy words.

The guy spoke to Park Go-chan, whose face has firmly frozen.

“Men, women, old, young, it’s possible for everyone. Using five fingers, one is bound to poke the eye. However, not everyone who can do it will try.”

The guy’s masterful speech and strong accent was like that of a Chinese person or a Korean Chinese.

“What do you think of me? Do you think me a person that will hesitate to harm another human?”

“Sh-shit, what are you saying, you Korean Chinese bastard.” His speech is still threatening but his voice has gotten a lot quieter than before.

“Didn’t you say ‘let’s establish a pecking order’?”

“What, what if I did?”

Park Go-chan’s voice begins to shake.

A cold grin appears on the guys lips.

“Come at me”

“You, you bastard? You can’t see this? You think I’m joking?”

Park Go-chan once more waves his sword around for all to see, threatening.

“I see it. So I say, come at me.”

“This fucking bastard...!”

The volatile tension!

“Um, shouldn’t we be stopping this?”

The college student approaches me and carefully asks. I shake my head.

“Let’s leave them be.”

“What?”

“He won’t go at him.”

I tell him about Park Go-chan’s type.

“This kind of person won’t fight if they think they’ll get injured. That’s why all they do is threaten.”

It’s just like the bullies from high school. They only bother the weaklings who can’t fight back. They never touched the students who had the courage to fight.

Even thugs don’t tackle the kind of average person that will call the cops and scream and put up a fight. They only suck the blood out of the people that are too scared to resist and use those people as targets.

“Damn. It’s not like I can kill you either. Consider yourself lucky.”

As expected, Park Go-chan puts down his sword and backs down first. Everyone lets out a sigh of relief. We all thought the situation finally came to a close.

“I said come at me.”

The words emanate everywhere. The surprised Park Go-chan turns around.

Am I hallucinating? I feel like there is a malevolent energy flowing from the guy’s eyes.

“This bastard, you really wanna go at it!”

“Shouldn’t you take responsibility for the words you spit out?”

The beads of sweat began to form on Park Go-chan’s forehead.

‘The words ‘I shouldn’t have touched this guy’ were probably running through his head.’

“Hey, right now, we shouldn’t be fighting each other, let’s just stop it here shall we?”

Park Go-chan speaks, trying really hard not to show his fear.

“I will count to 10.” The guy speaks. “If you don’t come at me, I’m going to pluck out an eye. I hate people who don’t take responsibility for their words the most.”

“Hey, hey now. I said let’s stop it here.”

“1, 2, 3, 4...”

As the numbers raced to 10, Park Go-chan’s face became awash with horror. Even as onlookers, we could tell.

Thug Park Go-chan is nothing. The real scary person is that guy

“...9, 10.”

In the end, Park Go-chan, who couldn't attack, held on to his sword, which was shaking like a leaf in the wind.

Staring at this, the guy spoke.

“This is your first and last warning.”

And then the guy turned around.

Park Go-chan's face became blank, as if he had just returned from hell.

‘It's that person!’

The one other person with the high score besides me. I'm sure of it.

Chapter 14 - Comrades (Part 1)

“I am Kim Hyun-ho and up to a while ago, I was studying for the civil exam. What are your names?”

I ask this after we walk for a while in a tense and awkward atmosphere. You should at least exchange names, you bitches.

The college student with the good cooperation answers.

“I am Lee Joon-ho. I am a new student that was just accepted into [Korea University](#)”

(TN: Korea University is the Harvard of Korea.)

He is indeed a college student. He did look young, but to think just a wee child of 20.

“Lee Hye-su...I was a company employee.”

The 20 something year old woman's name is Lee Hye-su. Seeing as how she used past tense, it sounds like she quit. And because Park Go-chan had already gone wild with his introduction, the only one left is the 30 year old guy. But even if he said nothing, we had no intention of saying anything about it.

“Kang Chun-seung, a martial artist from Shanghai.”

A martial artist from China!

And so we found out why Kang Chun-seung showed no fear at Park Go-chan.

Park Go-chan's expression became ugly. If he had actually attacked him, he would have lost all face.

After name exchanging was done, we once again continued to walk in an awkward atmosphere.

Lee Joon-ho was the only one who barely kept up a minimal conversation.

Company employee Lee Hye-Su replied with short comments to our minimalistic conversation, but probably due to the shock she received of almost suffering the abuse from Park Go-chan, her words dwindled.

“My throat is slowly getting dry. Where do you think the water might be?”

It was Lee Joon-ho's words.

“I will try and find some. Sylph!”

After starting the second exam, I summon Sylph for the first time.

-Meow.

Sylph appeared in the middle of the air and rubbed her face against my cheek.

“Oh? What is that?”

Lee Joon-ho asked, completely surprised. Lee Hye-su, Park Go-chan, and Kang Chun-seung too were all surprised and looked in my direction. I explained.

“This is the spirit summon skill I earned with my karma prize. She is a wind spirit by the name of Sylph.”

“Spirit summon? Of the assist skills, there was that?”

“Main skill.”

At my words, many people reacted.

“Your main skill?!”

“That’s your main skill?!”

“Main skill?”

Lee Joon-ho, Park Go-chan, and even Kang Chan-seung all had a

surprised reaction.

The Kang Chan-seung, who up to now had been of so few words, asked me.

“How much karma did you get from the first exam?”

“500 karma.”

“...!”

Kang Chan-seung’s entire face is engrossed in shock. So it seems my score was significantly higher than his.

“Are you joking? How could someone like you get 500 karma?”

Park Go-chan starts the nitpicking again. I shrug my shoulders.

“I was told it was the result of evaluating potential rather than ability. Anyway, with that, I got the spirit summon and a rifle. If you can’t believe it, you want to see?”

I summoned the single shot magic gun and bandolier. The bandolier had an extra 100 lead bullets in it and was thicker than before.

“It doesn’t even make sense...”

Park Go-chan's expression was seemed that this was difficult to believe.

Humph, now you see? I am not someone for you to laugh at or dismiss. At some point, I will make you pay back for having hit me.

“Sylph, look for water nearby.”

-Meow!

Sylph swiftly flew away.

In the meantime, I ask the others.

“What did you guys get with you karma prizes? I think we should know so that we coordinate better when we get into fights later on.”

“You really are amazing. On my first exam, I got 270 karma. All the main skills were 400 karma so I was unable to learn any.”

The cooperative Lee Joon-ho answered first.

“Without any other choices, I selected the secondary skill, ‘physical strength buff’ and learned it to level 2, and with the leftover karma I got a shield. I will show you.”

As he was speaking, Lee Joon-ho summoned a round leather shield. It seems he has no weapon.

“What is the physical strength buff?”

I hadn't seen the assist skills and am curious.

“Just like it sounds, it enhances your physical strength skill. Entry level 1 makes your body that of a healthy adult man, and level 2 gave me a body with exceptional athleticism.”

As if shy about it, Lee Joon-ho scratched his head.

“I'm usually weak bodied, so I started with level 2 of it.”

Lee Joon-ho is rather short, but his build looks fit. But it seems that it's thanks to the physical strength buff assist skill he learned rather than from lots of exercise.

“That is a really good skill. My body is not that good either; may I ask how much karma that cost?”

“The entry level 1 is 100 karma; entry level 2 is 150 karma.”

That is the revolution of the health industry.

I am a person with a complex from my ‘nothing-to-see skinny body.’ But if I get the assist skill, I wouldn’t even need to exercise and can be an [moem-jjang](#)!

(TN: It doesn’t translate well into English. But it kind of means to be an awesome bodied person.)

‘When this exam is over, I should get that right away.’

Not from my greed for a good body but because fitness is an important aspect, is all.”

“Ah damn, I got 250 karma. You saying I’m not as good as that dude?”

Park Go-chan whines and swears at the same time. The startled Lee Joon-ho draws back in fear.

“I received entry level 3 physical strength buff and a sword.”

“Level 3?”

“You think I’m the same as you guys? My fitness was originally good, bastards.”

“I see.”

Park Go-chan had originally a body that fit into the entry level 2 buff so he was able to learn right into level 3.

‘So if I have the fitness of a healthy adult male, I’ll be able to learn starting at level 2.’

I have learned a good truth.

Now it is Lee Hye-su’s turn. She paused for a second and then carefully spoke.

“With 100 karma, I learned physical strength correction entry level 1. Other than that I don’t have anything. I’m sorry...”

“Haha, that’s okay, miss. I said I’d protect you.”

At Park Go-chan’s devious comment, Lee Hye-su goes pale.

-Meow.

Right on time, Sylph returns.

“Did you find water?”

-Meow!

Sylph suggested a left direction and with speed wrote ‘293’

“Thanks. I’ll call you again later.”

I un-summon Sylph and speak to the group.

“300 meters from here there is water.”

We head off in the direction Sylph pointed. As we walked I asked Kang Chan-seung.

“What did you choose with your prize?”

“400 karma. Aura control, entry level 1”

400 karma. Lower than me.

I kind of get an idea of how everyone fought in the first exam.

The hiding red ape attacks but Kang Chan-seung, like a martial artist, quickly avoids it, retaliates, and knocks out the red ape I’m sure. Anyway, the aura control seems very fitting for a martial artist.

But then Kang Chan-seung’s words continue.

“Right now, I am entry level 4.”

“Huh?”

“Even without karma, through training, it was possible to raise the level.”

It was a revelation worth a shock.

That you can raise your skill level through training and not karma!

‘Huh? But there would only have been 11 days to train the aura control?’

The question forms and I ask Kang Chan-seung.

“Did you raise 3 levels in 11 days?”

“Aura control turned out to have similar principles to Tai chi. I have trained in [Baguazhang and fanziquan](#) my entire life.”

(TN: Bāguà zhǎng is known for circle walking. It literally means ‘eight trigram palm.’ Fānziquán routines are usually quite short and very fast. It literally means ‘rotating fist.’)

I became terrified at Kang Chan-seung’s awesomeness.

In other words he just didn’t have the aura but from the beginning, he had the capability to start at entry level 4!

It's to the point where I cannot believe he is an examinee who has just finished their first exam. I want to see him fight and see how strong he is.

Anyway, I have a basic idea of how we should fight in my head.

I will shoot from a distance, and the three men will fight in front and protect Lee Hye-su.

‘In the end, Lee Hye-su is the problem. Since she has nothing but the physical strength buff entry level 1. Then again, since she has the fitness of a healthy adult male, perhaps she will be the same or better than me?’

Lee Joon-ho has nothing but a shield so he will have to find a weapon.

‘I'm sure cutting wood into two spears should be worth something?’

According to my guess, if the opponent we fight is a red ape, then a spear will be sufficient enough.

I wonder how far we've walked?

We arrive at a trickling stream.

We can see a rabbit that had been drinking water quickly dash

away.

“Sylph!”

-Meow?

Sylph is summoned.

“Catch the rabbit!”

-Meow!

Sylph fled into the woods after the rabbit that left no trace.

A moment later, Sylph appears with the rabbit's neck bit in her mouth. The rabbit bitten in Sylph's teeth just dangled in the air. For now I capture the rabbit by grabbing its ears. Then I ask Sylph.

“Can you make the wind as sharp as a knife and cut the rabbit's carotid?”

-Meow.

Sylph nods her head.

I carry the rabbit to the stream/brook. I hold the rabbit over the stream and say to Sylph.

“Do it.”

_Meow!

Using the wind like a knife, Sylph slit the rabbit’s throat.

Chwak! (gushing sound)

Blood poured out from the rabbit’s neck. The stream turned red in an instant.

The rabbit took its final breath and its body relaxes. I grab the back legs and flip it around so the blood all pours into the stream.

“Oh, she is quite useful?”

Park Go-chan is lightly moved.

Up to that point is okay, but then he adds useless words.

“From now on, you be in charge of food.”

My face grows an angry red.

‘That thug bastard. Who is he to be giving out orders?’

I already have a grudge from being hit before.

In my mind, I'm thinking that I want to slit his throat too.

‘Wait and see.’

My insides boil up.

Chapter 15 - Comrades (Part 2)

Our group shoves their faces in the stream and drink water. I'm thirsty too, of course, but I have to hold the rabbit until all the blood is drained. But how long do I have to hold it?

“Give it here. I can hold it.”

Lee Joon-ho has finished drinking his water and approaches.

“Thank you.”

Of everyone in the group, I like Lee Joon-ho the best.

I drink from the stream and by the time I'm done washing my face, the rabbit has been drained of all its blood.

Now I have to cut it but, of all of the people here, no one has a knife. Without another option, even that gets left to Sylph.

Sylph cuts the rabbit using the wind like a knife. Because I had done basic studying on the internet of how to butcher animals, I was able to properly give commands.

After cutting the lower belly and ankles, the hide comes off.

“Ook!”

Lee Hye-su, who sees this, lets out a gag. I understand. I'm going crazy, how much worse must it be for a girl?

After cutting the head off and completely taking off the skin, a red body is what's left.

Using Sylph again, she starts cutting from the rectum towards the belly; we had large intestine – small intestine-liver- heart. The liver and heart we can eat, so it was put aside and the rest was buried in the ground.

The group watches my dismantling project.

Killing one life and dismantling it is a first for me too and my hands shake.

‘Even so, it must become familiar.’

Using the stream water to rinse all the foreign matter off, the rabbit's body is finished and looks good to eat.

“Wow, you knew how to do this stuff too?”

The on looking Lee Joon-ho is impressed and amazed. I shrug my shoulders.

“No, I watched from the internet and just studied it a bit. Thanks

to Sylph, it did end up getting done though.”

“Your prep work is really good. That must be why [hyung-nim](#) earned the most karma. Ah, is it okay that I call you hyung-nim?”

(TN: Hyung is what a male would call an older brother/male. Nim is an ending to show respect. So Hyung-nim is kind of calling him honorable older brother. It can also mean boss in some situations.)

“[Just call me hyung.](#)”

(TN: Up to here, they have been speaking formally to each other.)

“[Really?](#)”

(said informally.)

It was easy getting closer to this friendlier, easy going Lee Joon-ho.

“If you’re all done, hurry up and grill it. I’m hungry.”

Park Go-chan leaned his back against a tree and slumped onto the floor. Man, that guy, seriously.

I ask Kang Chan-seong.

“Shall we rest here for the night? Or should we move a little more?”

“Do what you want”

Kang Chan-seong’s reply is without respect.

‘Geez, this is so frustrating.’

Kang Chan-seong is a character equally as annoying as Park Go-chan, but for different reasons.

He is the strongest of us and the only viable person to whom Park Go-chan can’t do anything to. If he would step up to the leader position, our teamwork would be lot better, but he consistently acts without interest.

‘Does he lack tact?’

I had asked Kang Chan-seong on purpose so he could say the opposite of Park Go-chan’s thoughtless opinion to rest here.

Stopping here to eat in broad daylight when there might be a hoard of red apes chasing is a bad idea.

‘There’s no other choice.’

I decide to step up myself.

“For now, let’s move a bit further and later in the evening we will set up camp.”

“Ok, I got it. Let’s eat first, you bastard.”

“Then we would need a fire.”

“Build one, asshole.”

“Do you know how to build one?”

“What?”

“I asked if you know how to build a fire. I think it will be difficult and you want to do one now and do it again later when we set up camp?”

“It’ll be fine if I just do it then, bastard.”

Park Go-chan’s voice becomes steadily louder. One more word and he’ll explode.

My heart thumps and thumps and shakes. Okay, I am not familiar with fighting. [I am scared of a gangster](#). If we were to fight I might win, but I am still scared. We aren’t in a position to fight and I don’t want to raise the face reddening tension.

(TN: The word he used is like someone that uses violence to solve problems.)

I turn my head and speak to Kang Chan-seong.

“I think first we should keep moving, sound good?”

“Let’s.”

“He said let’s?”

I ask Park Go-chan.

“You sh—.”

Park go-chan looks like he is going to explode. Kang Chan-seong says let’s, so he can’t go against it.

I take the rabbit and its hide and we start to move again. We move, following the flowing stream. It would be good if there was a safe location like a cave.

And then, Park Go-chan approaches me.

“Hey, Kim Hyun-ho”

“Yes?”

“Be careful”

“...”

“If you talk back to me like that one more time, I’ll rip your head off. Got it?”

“Like Sylph did?”

“...!”

This time, Park Go-chan flinches. No matter what evil reputation he had as a thug, Sylph is way better at the head ripping.

Honestly, I’m surprised myself. I had fantasized so much about ordering Sylph to cut his throat, that the reply came out as a reflex.

Park Go-chan looked at me with scared eyes for a while and we continued to walk.

‘Haaa.....’

I let out a sigh.

It’s now just the first day. It’s already so tiring and difficult even though we haven’t even gotten into a fight with the red apes.

As we walked, every now and then, I summoned Sylph to scout the area and look for a cave where we might be able to set up camp.

After walking for a couple hours, Sylph discovered a cave. Only after crossing through a switchback trail were we able to arrive at the cave.

“I think it will be a good idea to set up camp here tonight, yes?”

Lee Joon-ho and Lee Hye-su nod their heads. Park Go-chan and Kang Chan-seong are still without comment.

Well, even so, I take it as a consensus and prepare to start a small fire.

“We have to build a fire, so everyone gather dry twigs and leaves and straw from around here please.”

I say such and I to head from the cave.

Lee Joon-ho and Lee Hye-su moved as soon as my words left my lips, Park Go-chan sat in the cave and didn't move a muscle.

Kang Chan-seong walked off in a direction different from ours.

**

Joon-ho, Lee Hye-su, and I went together and gathered twigs and leaves and straw.

“Joon-ho, you, and miss Hye-su also, will you be needing a weapon?” I ask.

“Yes...”

“I need one. Speaking of, I was looking around for something I could use as a weapon.”

“What do you think if we cut some wood into spears?”

“Wah, then I would be grateful.”

“Thank you.”

It seemed that Lee Hye-su also wanted it, because she nodded her head deeply

It's a forest that overshadows the Amazon and there are an abundance of disgustingly large trees. I grab just any tree and begin the project.

“Sylph.”

-Meow

Again, I summoned Sylph.

“Please cut me two branches longer than 2 meters. Ones that grew as straight as possible.”

-Meow.

Sylph fleets on by and cuts two branches and offers them to me.

I continue to use Sylph to cut off the smaller branches and cut the limb into an even thickness.

As the branch took shape as a spear, the tip was cut sharp. And so the two wooden spears were completed.

“It’s a little clumsy but for now, use these.”

I hand them to Joon-ho and Lee Hye-su.

“Thanks, hyung.”

“Thank you.”

For firewood, I use Sylph to cut a few more branches into logs.

When we return to the cave, Kang Chan-seong has returned also. At his feet were a stack of logs.

I wondered how he could have produced the logs without a weapon, but looking at the condition of his firewood I could hazard a guess.

‘Hul, he broke them with his fists.’

It seems that using fists along with aura control are able to break thick branches like those.

“Hyung, do you know how to start a fire?”

“Yup.”

In anticipation for such situations, I had done some fire play as practice on Mount Taejo in the dead of night.

“I’ll help.”

“Then grab this wood and this and keep rubbing them together.”

“Ok.”

Joon-ho took a small branch and started to strongly rub it into the firewood.

He had to rub for a long time, but maybe thanks to the entry level 2 physical strength buff, Joon-ho was able to keep rubbing. Impressive. I want to quickly gain the physical strength buff.

The frictional heat starts to produce smoke and I summon Sylph and order.

“Sylph, concentrate the oxygen.”

-Meow

To think that the wind spirit Sylph even had a talent like this. Sylph gathers leaves and straw and raises the oxygen concentration.

Hwaluk-.

The fire blazed up.

“It’s done!”

Joon-ho was so happy he almost jumped.

The gathered leaves, straw, and dry twigs were put into the fire and then we threw in the firewood. The fire in front of the cave was a success.

Chapter 16 - Comrades (Part 3)

The fire blazed up.

“It’s done!”

Joon-ho was so happy he almost jumped.

The gathered leaves, straw, and dry twigs were put into the fire and then we gathered in the firewood. The fire in front of the cave was a success.

“Now, it’s time to grill the rabbit...”

“Should we roast it whole?”

“Yeah. We’ll stab it through with a skewer and rotate it over the fire.”

“Will this work?”

Joon-ho hands out the wooden spear I made him.

“Sure. If it becomes unusable, I’ll make you another one”

“Ok.”

I stabbed the spear through the rabbit and placed it over the fire.

I motion to Lee Hye-su to call her over.

“Miss Hye-su, please grill this”

“.... Ok”

Lee Hye-su obediently grabbed the spear and began to grill the rabbit. I spoke to her quietly.

“If you contribute by doing a lot to these things, the karma you earn should increase. Miss Hye-su, you have a disadvantage in fighting, so try to do more of these things.”

I continue to speak in a low voice.

“Earn the karma and master your skills and get stronger and Park Go-chan won’t be able to touch you.”

“Thank you, so much.”

She expressed her gratitude.

In the rising fire, her face is visible.

Looking closely, she is without makeup, but her bare face alone is

pretty.

White and delicate skin. Her short, permed hair goes well with her slender face. Her height looks similar to Hyun-ji's at 165 cm (about 5 ft 4 inches), and her skinny legs in black training pants are impressionable.

‘This is why Park Go-chan is drooling.’

Even after having his pride bent by Kang Chan-seong, Park Go-chan was still a roughneck. Riding on Kang Chan-seong's lack of interest in anything, he tactfully causes strife. Seeing his shamelessness, it is evident that he will continue to cause problems with Lee Hye-su.

‘For now, I shall protect her.’

Kang Chan-seong is disinterested; Joon-ho is kind but weak, so that just leaves me. We are due to oppose each other anyway.

The tasty meat grilling smell spread around. Hye-su slowly rotating and grilling the whole rabbit was almost finished cooking.

“Is it all cooked through?”

“I think so.”

“Then I'll cut it.”

Hye-su took the entire rabbit out of the campfire. I used Sylph to cut the whole rabbit into five portions and shared it amongst everyone. Really, because we have no knife, I must rely on Sylph for even these trivial things.

The rabbit meat tasted decent. It was too hot, so it was uncomfortable to eat with bare hands, and no seasonings meant it was bland, but I didn't care since I was eating it on an empty stomach.

“Ah, this is so bland.”

Park Go-chan is complaining. Then why not just starve to death?

“Hey asshole, go catch another one. Think this will be enough?”

Ah, I don't even want to share words. I take a piece of candy out of my pocket and throw it to Park Go-chan.

“Oh? What is this?”

“Can't you tell by looking at it?”

“Where did you get this! You can bring this kind of stuff here?”

“Originally, you can't. He said it was a special service?”

“That shit, I couldn’t even bring my cigarettes and lighter, is he discriminating or what!”

But then, as soon as he popped the candy in his mouth, he shut up. I wonder if the price of shutting his mouth is a piece of candy.

I share the candy with everyone else.

“Thanks, hyung.”

“Thank you.”

Joon-ho and Lee Hye-su express their gratitude. Should I just escape in the night with these two?

Dinner is over and the night is deep.

“We need to decide on the sentry order.”

Before going to bed, I mention it.

“What sentry crap.”

This is, of course, Park Go-chan.

“We have to watch the fire and also watch out for the threat of an attack. I think we can each take turns for 1 hour 20 minutes. Would it be okay if I just decide the order?”

I purposely ask Kang Chan-seong. Kang Chan-seong nods his head. Thanks to him, Park Go-chan can't complain about it.

The sentry order is as follows.

Lee Hye-su, Lee Joon-ho, me, Kang Chan-seong, Park Go-chan. Putting Park-go Chan as the last sentry was a difficult, but fortuitous, decision I came to after much thought.

He may not wake up when being woken. That's why before him, I put Kang Chan-seong. If Kang Chan-seong wakes him, what is he going to do but wake up?

Also, there is concern that the next sentry will be called before the time is up. That's why he is last. This way he can't complain about the sentry problem.

First in line, Lee Hye-su stands guard at the front of the cave by the fire. The rest of us get ready for bed inside the cave. Most of us toss and turn because of how uncomfortable it is. I stuff the rabbit leather full of straw and make myself a pillow. The hunting and the filleting was done by me so this pillow is a privilege that I alone deserve.

Thanks to having dressed warmly, I was just barely able to

withstand the cold air of the night.

And so I finished the first night of the second exam.

“Wake up”

The voice waking us was Kang Chan-seong.

“Ugg.”

I moan from the fatigue and wake from my sleep. I summon my board to check the time and it hasn't even been 40 minutes since I finished my guard.

“What is the matter?”

“The bastards are here.”

At those words I am fully awake. The others are surprised too and grab their weapons.

“Sylph, weapon, equip.”

Only after assuming battle stance do I ask Sylph.

“Sylph, are enemies nearby?”

-Meow.

Sylph nods her head.

“Do they look like monkeys and have red fur?”

-Meow.

This time too, Sylph nods her head.

“It really is those bastards.”

Park Go-chan grabs his sword tightly.

Sylph draws the number 21 in the dirt.

“21 of them?”

“There, there are that many!”

At the news of 21, Joon-ho freaks out, and Lee Hye-su’s face goes white. Both her hands gripping the spear are shaking like aspen trees.

“Well, as long as we can guard the entrance of the cave. No matter the number, tell ‘em to come.”

Says Park Go-chan confidently. But then I refute.

“No. we have to guard the fire.”

“What?”

“They’re purposely attacking at night. That’s because they’re confident in the dark. They will probably first...”

I was about to say that they will go for the fire first.

“Kee-ek!”

“Kee-ek!”

The red apes send out shrieks from the forest and throw rocks. The rocks hit the fire and send out sparks and ash in all directions.

If the fire goes out, we will suddenly become disadvantaged!

I quickly take out a fistful of lead bullets and put one in the chamber.

“Sylph, please aim for me.”

-Meow!

I put the butt of the gun to my shoulder and pull the trigger.

Toong-Puk!

“KKek!”

As the bullet was shot, the short cry of a red ape spread out from the inside of the forest. The neck, head, or heart will have been shot, because Sylph will have aimed it so.

I continue to quickly add lead bullets and shoot. I have Sylph, so I don't need to aim.

Toong-Puk!

“Kkek!”

Each time the magic gun shoots out a lead bullet, a cry comes from within the forest.

“Wow...”

Lee Joon-ho is in awe.

“How are you getting them when you can’t even see them?”

Park Go-chan has on a face of disbelief.

I have killed six in mere moments.

“Kee-ekk!”

“Ggi-ekk!”

The angry yelling spread from inside the forest. Red apes wielding stone hatchets couldn’t contain themselves and have come dashing out.

15 red apes come swarming like a wave.

“I’ll help from the back!”

I yelled. As I did, the first person to jump out of the cave is Kang Chan-seong.

I thought he was going to step on them but as he heads forward, he spreads out his right hand.

Bbuk!

A single blow.

The red ape who got hit by the palm had his face turned 180 degrees. It was to the point I heard the sound of his neck break from where I was standing.

“Ggi-ekk!”

From the front, a different bastard swings his hatchet. The sight makes us twinge.

Bbuk!

The red ape attacked first but Kang Chan-seong's fist landed on the apes chin first. Kang Chan-seong again twists his body in the opposite direction and grabs another apes neck and legs and throws it. The thrown ape collides with other bastards.

‘What in the world!’

It was not thrown with strength. He collapsed his balance and used minimal strength to throw the ape. That is a Baguazhang martial artist.

He is really strong. It felt like Kang Chan-seong alone could defeat them all.

‘I can't just stand here and be a spectator.’

After loading the gun, I pull the trigger.

Toong-puk!

From one of their heads, blood exploded like a fountain.

On top of the gun and also from watching Kang Chan-seong fight, the rest of the spectating group focus.

Lee Joon-ho cautiously moved forward with his shield and spear gripped.

“If I want karma, I have to fight!”

Park Go-chan screams out and races forward.

“Huk, huk...!”

Only Lee Hye-su was frozen in fear and unable to move.

The fight was quickly over.

I killed 9.

Lee Joon-ho fought hard, but finished with just injuring one or

two, Park Go-chan zealously swung his sword, but compared to how uncontrollably he swung, he killed one and injured another.

The rest were nearly all Kang Chan-seong. He was nearly one blow, one kill, executed perfectly.

“Kek!”

“Keek!”

The remaining two apes run away in fear. I yell.

“Sylph! Cut their throats and kill them all!”

-Meow!

Sylph flies by like a shot. Their agonizing death howl emanates for a short while through the forest.

And thus, the fight ends in a big victory for us.

Chapter 17 - Bloodshed (Part 1)

Now that the fight is over, the smell of blood was wafting everywhere. The heaps of red ape carcasses that was now laying around was oddly unreal.

In the first exam, killing just the one was enough for me. After barely managing to strangle its neck with a vine, I was in a shocked daze for a while.

But today, 11 of them died at my hands. It was much easier than it was in the first exam.

‘I’m supposed to become used to this shitty feeling? Do I look like that kind of person to you?’

‘Yes, you do look like that kind of person.’”

In the end, the baby angel was right. I’m a person capable of doing that and more. But there are those that seemingly are not.

“Oo-eck!”

Lee Hye-su was gagging. Seeing her face smeared in tears, the sympathy floods over.

“Are you okay?”

“Yes.... I’m sorry...”

She could barely hold in her crying to reply.

“Why wouldn’t she be okay? All she did was stand around in the back and spectate.”

The openly sarcastic Park Go-chan. Perhaps those words were hurtful enough because Lee Hye-su’s crying gets louder.

‘You didn’t really have a big part either, okay ajusshi?’

Park Go-chan’s clear intentions make me hate him more.

Not just because he’s a dick, but he continues to smother Lee Hye-su this way and suffocate her.

I will protect you but in turn, give me your body; to justify a kind of deal like that.

‘This is big. In order to overcome a situation like this, I myself have to take up the courage and actively fight.’

Lee Hye-su was more useless than I thought, which worries me.

If she continues to be a burden this way, a place for her in the team will disappear. The gazes from the other team members, who

see her as just a hindrance, continues to grow colder and eventually it may become just the situation that Park Go-chan wants.

“Hyung, do you think this was it?”

“No way.” I shook my head. “If it was to end like this, they wouldn’t have given us the mission to survive for a week.”

“Anyway, it was like you said, the enemy to fight turned out to be the red apes.”

“It’s a good thing at least that it wasn’t an enemy we didn’t know. But...” I look around at the corpses strewn before the cave and sigh. “We cannot stay here anymore.”

“Can’t we just stay here? We can fight like we did today and endure for a week.”

Perhaps. I am of the mind that we have to hurry and leave this place, but I guess I should ask for everyone’s opinion.

I ask them all.

“I think we should leave before more of the bastards come, but what do you all think?”

“This place is safe.”

Kang Chun-seong disagrees. It's an important matter so this guy is putting forth an opinion.

“If we fight in the forest, I can't guarantee anything.”

That is true. This cave here has an expansive space in front of it and makes it easier to fight. But the forest is different.

There are too many things the bastards can hide behind and it's not only left, right, front, back but they may attack from above from the trees. Such a 3-dimensional attack is much more beneficial to the bastards, who have numbers on their side.

“But staying in this place is just as dangerous.”

“And why is that?”

“First, I will point out the red apes' intelligence. They not only set up an ambush attack, but they will also wait until nightfall to strike. They also have the decision making skill to go after the fire first.”

My explanation continues.

“In that case, instead of coming out and attacking us first, might they not surround the place and attack us when we go out to gather water or food?”

“.... Indeed.”

Kang Chun-seong agrees.

At my opinion, everyone's faces freeze in seriousness. It's not a time to rejoice because we won one fight.

“But the fortunate aspect of this is that we killed them all and didn't leave a single one. We have some time before they may attack again, so how about in that time we look for another base?”

“Okay.”

“Me too, hyung.”

“Me too...”

Kang Chun-seong, Joon-ho, Lee Hye-su all vote yes and lastly, Park Go-chan nods his head too.

And so, we decide to leave the cave but before departing, I take off the three sets of underwear and socks, one by one.

I wrap them around the ends of the sticks we collected for firewood and put it in the fire.

Hwa leo leok –

‘Oh ho ho, it works.’

I look at my makeshift torchlight and am proud of myself.

“Hyung, is this why your underwear and socks...”

“I wore three pairs.”

Can you not treat me like I’m obviously going commando?

“Wow, hyung, your preparedness is really incredible. I hadn’t thought that far at all.”

The day was still dark, so I hold up my torchlight and lead the way.

“Sylph, can you find out if there is another cave nearby?”

-Meow

Sylph flits away. In a short while after searching the entirety of a 1.1 km diameter, Sylph shakes her head. Of course, caves probably aren’t that common here.

Thankfully, the red apes are not within this perimeter.

“For now, we will have to walk. Earlier, the bastards tried to flee in that direction so we will go in the direction opposite that.”

As I led the way, the group blindly follows. Perhaps it is due to my role in killing 11 of the apes that even Park Go-chan isn't hostile and has become compliant.

Somehow, it seems I have become the leader of the group. I didn't want to be in this position, but the situation strangely became so. Kang Chun-seong was originally disinterested and Park Go-chan's inhospitable attitude naturally left the leadership role to me.

As we continued to walk, the sun began to rise. As the day grew brighter, I threw away the torchlight and continued to walk.

I did not forget to summon Sylph every 5 minutes and scout the area for 60 seconds.

According to Sylph's reconnaissance, there are plenty of herbivores like rabbits, deer, and monkeys within this forest.

“It seems there are a considerable number of the red apes here.”

“Have they appeared?”

At Park Go-chan's question, I shake my head.

“We have been going through the forest since yesterday and we have only discovered herbivores. Compared to how plentiful the prey is here and, aside from snakes and owls, the only predators that remain are the red apes.”

“This forest is their area.”

Kang Chun-seong speaks up.

I nod my head.

“If indeed they use this space as their area, they will be a considerable group.”

And there will definitely be a head to command them all.

That head may be, at this moment, looking on at his 21 dead comrades and consumed in rage.

“Ki-aaaaaak-!”

It is a roar of anger.

The red apes are in fear in concert and cringe.

A physique up to 2 meters. Fur as red as blood.

The outward appearance brags an overwhelming majesty and its owner is full of wrath.

There is a type of red ape called Rode. Every generation there are but one or two that are born with this mutation and they are twice as big and strong as the average type. They have no choice but to be destined to be the leader.

But of course, to get there, they have their own trials they must face.

The current leader had to go through them too.

The red ape, Rode, appeared no different than the average type at birth, but as time went on, the characteristics of the special type start to show.

The existing leader had expressed strong hostility towards his potential competition. Because of this, before the young one was trampled, he had to flee.

Separated from the group, Rode survived alone in the forest through a bitter adolescence.

Then one day, Rode realized he himself had grown as big as the

leader and returned to the group. The leader he met was not scary the way he had been when Rode was younger.

He challenged, and he won.

From then to now, it was an omnipotent rule.

Another special type was born, grew and challenged, but Rode won. After defeating two challengers and preserving his seat as leader, Rode emerged as the strongest ruler there ever was.

And this Rode was in a full rage.

“Ki-aaaaak-!”

Hundreds of red apes shivered in horror. There were plenty of beasts of prey and monsters that flowed into this rich forest. And every time, Rode eradicated them. Leading the pack and at times, using his own strength, he showed the majesty of being a leader.

Their area continued to grow and, without precedent, they reproduced to great numbers. And then from this forest, their breed began to die.

An enemy had come into their domain and so he had sent his subordinates.

But the time had passed and without any word or news, he came

out himself and his subordinates were but corpses. And it happened on their own land.

It cannot be forgiven.

He must punish those who ignore his authority.

“Ki-eeeeek!” Rode gives out an order.

“Ki-ek!”

“Ggi-ek!”

“Ki-eeek!”

Hundreds of red apes barked and growled their agreement.

Revenge for blood!

The bloodbath to protect their group’s domain was about to begin.

We followed the flow of the small river and walked. On account of not having a canteen, I felt it was a good idea to stay close to water. The river had plenty of large fish and so it was easy to get

food too. Using Sylph, rabbit hunting is easy, but prepping and cooking a fish is even easier.

Using a wooden stick, I shaved it sharp to create a simple knife, and using this, Lee Hye-su prepped and cooked the fish. Per my suggestion, she was trying to take care of the small things.

In the fight the previous night, she was a burden and she must have been aware of it. If she doesn't help even with things like this, she won't receive any karma and will continue to be of no use.

‘Anyway, it’s weird.’

Observing from yesterday and today, her body physique doesn't look any different to me than the average woman. It was obvious when she trying not to show that she was tired and her feet were hurting from the walking.

‘Didn't she say she got the entry level 1 physical strength buff?’

I heard that the entry level 1 physical strength buff was the level of a healthy adult male. It means it's better than my crappy health condition.

Sylph and I started a fire and she grilled the fish and handed it out to everyone. As soon as the cooking was done, I quickly put out the fire. It's possible our location can be given away from the rising smoke.

“If you’re all done eating, let’s go. We have to get rid of the smell on our bodies so please don’t forget to wash as well.”

“Ugh, how annoying.”

Park Go-chan is mumbling and washing his hands in the brook. The rest of the group follows my words obediently.

The biggest reason for following the brook is this.

If we follow the flowing water, I’m hoping our body scent might dissipate a little bit.

Normally, carnivores have an acute sense of smell and I think the red ape is no different. It uses tools and has intelligence, but they do look closer to beast than to humans.

As we begin to move, I summon Sylph and send her out to scout.

Like her namesake, she flies away like the wind and returns after scouting and very much unlike her, she isn’t being [aegyo](#) and instead, screams.

(TN: There isn’t an English equivalent word for this. It means to act in a cute manner.)

-MEOOW!

“Is there something wrong?”

Sylph draws a number in the dirt.

“293 meters?”

-Meow!

Sylph shakes her head. Then do you mean...

“293 of them?”

-Meow!

Sylph is nodding her head.

“What is she saying? There’s 300?!” Park Go-chan freaks out.

“Maybe she means something d-different? Like a group of ants or mice...” Joon-ho asks in disbelief and I ask Sylph to be sure.

“There are 293 red apes?”

-Meow!

“Where are they?”

Sylph spins round and round. I couldn't tell what that means and I ponder for a while. As Sylph spun around us in circles, I finally understood.

“All around us?”

-Meow!

“Have they surrounded us?”

Sylph is shaking her head.

“So they are dispersed and searching through the forest for us?”

-Meow!

After the fight last night, we had briskly escaped. But the bastards are already all around us!

“Hey you shit, what's going on! You said we had some time before they came again!” Park Go-chan gets angry at me.

Why are you asking me?

The answer is simple!

They're moving faster than we are.

Chapter 18 - Bloodshed (Part 2)

“It’s probably because while we were walking, they were running.”

“You bitch, this is all because of you, you maggot!”

“What, what did I...!”

Park Go-chan is threatening Lee Hye-su again. That behavior in this situation, it seems to have become a habit.

I come between the two of them and speak.

“Now is not the time for this, we have to keep moving. Thankfully, the bastards haven’t found out exactly where we are. That’s why they’re dispersed and are flipping through this whole forest.”

“Hyung, then what do we do?”

Joon-ho’s voice is shaking. Why do you keep asking me? I’m going crazy too!

I can barely hold my shaking heart and speak.

“We have to move a bit faster. We have to move carefully so as not to run into them, and when we have no choice, we have to

make our way by fighting through them.”

“Wouldn’t it be better to find a scary spot and just hide out in it?”

I shake my head at Park Go-chan’s question.

“Our traces will soon be picked up. From that point on, they will know where we move so before that happens, we have to burst through those that are surrounding us. “

“Our trace will be picked up? Hey, you, with what proof...”

“We grilled a fish earlier!”

“...!”

Park Go-chan instantly shuts up.

Did you think the red apes wouldn’t be able to pick up on the scent of a fire and a grilled fish?

It’s only a matter of time. When it is found, the scattered apes in the area will all head in our direction. Before then, we have to make it to a safe place.

“Sylph, show us the direction where the bastards aren’t.”

-Meow.

Sylph points with her front paw slightly left and ahead.

“Let’s go!”

At my words, the group begins to walk. Being in a tight situation, the groups walking is faster than it was before.

As our movement grew faster, it became obvious that it was growing difficult for her. But she looked like she was gritting her teeth and trying really hard to keep up. I think she is even more aware of everyone’s gaze because she was insulted by Park Go-chan earlier.

Because others may notice, I can’t even ask her if she is okay. Stepping on eggshells even amongst comrades... this doesn’t bode well.

No matter, that is a problem to be solved later. For now, we have to escape the current danger.

During our moving, I had un-summoned and repeatedly summoned Sylph in anticipation of a fight, but it was difficult keeping tracking and adjusting the summoning times. I was nervous whether I was un-summoning or summoning Sylph.

We were changing our direction accordingly and moving however Sylph told us to.

For an hour, we carefully avoided running into a red ape. And during that time, the red apes were narrowing down their field.

‘Well, this is practically their front lawn.’

As their search field got narrower, it became impossible to avoid the situation.

-Meow!

The once again summoned Sylph came back from scouting and told us the red apes’ location.

Ahead 312 meters, 25 red apes.

“It looks like we’ll have to fight.”

Our group summons its weapons and prepares to fight. Gripping a spear in each hand, Lee Hye-su worries me the most.

“Joon-ho. Protect her.”

“Yes, hyung.”

Kang Chun-seong will act alone in the front, Joon-ho and Park Go-chan will protect Lee Hye-su and work together to guard. I will

be in the back and shooting. This is what I conceive in my head.

With our nervous tension we head forward.

“Sylph, tell me when they are within 55 meters.”

-Meow

The max distance on my magic rifle is 60 meters. I am thinking that I will strike first and shoot. As we forged ahead, the group begins to walk slower. Then....

-Meow!

Sylph sends me the signal.

I take out a fistful of bullets from the bag. I put one in the chamber, aim ahead, and pull the trigger.

The moment I shoot, Sylph adjusts the gun with her front paw.

Toong!

From afar, I can hear the cry of one of them.

“Ki-eek!”

“Ki-ik!”

In their surprise, the red apes are flustered.

I shift my feet and continue to shoot. There is no need to worry about my stance. If I shoot, Sylph aims for me.

Tong!

“Kek!”

Every time I shoot, I can hear a cry.

2 shots, 3 shots, 4 shots...

When I have shot and killed 5, the red apes get our location and come hurdling at us.

“Ha-!”

From our side, Kang Chun-seong runs forward, straight towards them.

Joon-ho and Park Go-chan do not dare copy it and instead, stay planted where they are and guard.

I continue to shoot and kill another 2.

Toong!

“Kik!”

Toong-puk!

With every recoil from the heavy rifle, another ape’s head or neck explodes, and the sight no longer feels so terrible.

The encounter begins.

Heading for Kang Chun-seong, the red apes come at him from the front and left and right. At that moment.

Puh puh puh puh puk!

Kang Chun-seong’s two fists almost move faster than the eyes can see. The red apes get punched and get flung. Such incredible power! This must be the aura control.

But then in that instant, a bastard falls down from the tree above and lands on Kang Chun-seong.

“Danger...!”

The second I try to warn him, Kang Chun-seong reflexively reacts. Gripping the ground with one hand and doing a handstand, he kicks the ape in the head!

Bbagak!

“Ki ekk!”

The neck gets twisted and the red ape dies instantly in midair.

The moment he tries to regain his stance, more red apes pile on him.

Kang Chun-seong is lying flat on the ground when he grabs an apes legs and knocks it to the ground, using two feet to kick it in its core and fling it. The flung red ape collides with the others and they fall to the ground.

He flicks up his body in a single breath and Kang Chun-seong again showers punches and is a big success. I’m not sure if he is a person, but he is invincible.

The bastards decide Kang Chun-seong is too much to handle.

They avoid Kang Chun-seong and head straight for us.

“They’re, they’re coming!”

Joon-ho gets tense and holds up his shield.

“Fuck, come at me!”

He yells in a strong voice, but Park Go-chan stumbles backwards.

“Hu hu huk....!”

With a spear in each hand flailing aimlessly, Lee Hye-su lets out a cry.

‘Damn!’

As the bastards came just a stone’s throw away my heart felt rushed.

The method of putting a lead bullet in the chamber and manually loading a gun has never felt so inconvenient.

Toong – puk!

One bastard dies as his head explodes.

I load and aim the gun, shoot.

Toong – pak!

“Kek!”

It hit it in the heart and fell backwards, spewing blood.

Park Go-chan and Joon-ho were quickly surrounded by red apes and had to put up a cutthroat fight.

Joon-ho was somewhat holding his ground with his shield but Park Go-chan was clumsily swishing his sword around and looked to be in a predicament. From behind them, Lee Hye-su pretended to stab with her spear, but it was no help at all.

“Sylph! Cut their throats!”

-Meow!

Flying like the wind, Sylph slit three of their throats at once.

“Ki eeek!”

One of them headed in my direction with its pickax.

“Kuk!”

In my alarm, I walk backwards. Because I was being attacked in such close quarters I didn't have a moment to reload the gun. As a

red ape came at me from the front and the back, I quickly call out.

“Sylph!”

-Meow!

Sylph returns to me and cuts with the wind.

Chwak, chwak, chwak –

The three red apes let out a fall of blood from their necks.

I barely escaped danger, but there isn't a moment to breathe.

“Gyaak!”

Lee Hye-su has been attacked and fallen over.

“Miss Hye-su!”

In my haste, I run to her and hit the red ape with the butt of my rifle.

Bbuk!

“Ki ek!”

I hit it in the face and the red ape stumbles about.

The bastards continue to come at us from all direction. There is no time at all to load the gun!

“Get out of here, fuck!”

I yell out as I crazily swing the butt of my rifle around.

Puk!

“Aak!”

I thought I had avoided it, but a bastard has threw a rock and hit me in the left shoulder. Thank goodness I wasn't hit in the head.

‘This won't do!’

I take Lee Hye-su into my arms, who is still laying on the ground.

“Sylph! Lift us up!”

-Meow!

A sudden surge of wind. Caught up in the strong gust, Lee Hye-su

and I are taken up towards the sky.

“Gyaak!”

Out of fright, Lee Hye-su screams.

“On top of the tree!”

Per my instruction, Sylph lands on a large tree right next to us.

“Hold on tight!”

After yelling at Lee Hye-su, I quickly load a lead bullet. Done!

I aim and shoot at the red ape attacking Joon-ho and Park Go-chan.

Toong – puk!

The crown of its head explodes, killing the red ape.

I continue to efficiently load and pull the trigger.

One ape, two apes!

When I have shot three, a couple of them begin to climb up the

tree. Indeed, like their monkey appearance, they are extremely good at climbing.

“Miss Hye-su! Block the bastards! Just stab them with the spears!”

“Aaaak!”

In her panic, Lee Hye-su starts screaming and randomly stabbing with her spear.

The apes that were climbing are surprised and halt for a moment, then move over to a different branch and continue to come toward us.

In that time, I finish loading the gun and shoot at one.

Toong – puk!

“Ki ekk!”

The thing falls to the ground spewing blood from its neck.

But another two are attacking us. There is no time to reload.

I pull Lee Hye-su to me again.

“Sylph! Catch us!”

Lee Hye-su and I jump from the tree. When we land, the power of the wind gently sets us on the ground. After safely landing, I put down Lee Hye-su and once again fling around the butt of my rifle.

“Uh ak!”

I hear Joon-ho scream.

I’m surprised and look behind me to see that Joon-ho has lost his spear and is walking backwards. Blood was coming down his forehead. It seems he was hit in the head from a thrown rock.

“Sylph, wind knife!”

That second, Sylph threw her wind knife around everywhere

Chwak chwak chwak chwak – !

“Kek!”

“Kuh ek!”

“Ki ik!”

In an instant the three apes that had been attack us are on the

ground.

With perfect timing, Kang Chun-seong, who had been active alone on the frontline, returns to us to help.

As Kang Chun-seong joined us, the remaining red apes didn't easily attack us and hesitated.

‘Now’s the chance!’

I load the chamber and pull the trigger.

Toong – puk!

One bastard falls and dies.

The remaining red apes number just 4 beasts.

“Ki eeeek!”

“Ki eek!”

The bastards begin to run away in fright.

I feel reassured and the thought of shooting them in the back of their heads doesn't even enter my mind.

The exhausted Joon-ho collapses, sitting on the floor, and Park Go-chan tries to catch his breath. Lee Hye-su looked like her soul has left her body and just blankly stares into space.

The only one keeping their cool was Kang Chun-seong whose two fists and body were drenched in blood. It is probably red apes' blood.

Hold on, how much of Sylph's power did I use?

“Board Retrieval. Skill Review.”

-Spirit summon (Main skill). Lower level wind spirit is currently summoned.

*Level 1: Summons period 2 hours (Remaining time: 24 minutes)

When the summon time is up, you may re-summon in 10 hours.

‘Just 24 minutes!’

I feel my heart drop to the floor.

Then again, I did use a lot of wind knives and went up and back down a tree using Sylph's power.

Anyway, if a fight happens in this situation, the odds are unfavorable.

“There isn't much summoning time left for Sylph. We have to hurry up and go!”

The bastards that escaped will return to their group.

We have to move without a moment to rest. We set off, nearly running.

From within the forest, here and there, scary yelling noises emanated. It was like they were signaling to each other that our location has been found.

At these sounds we ran, panting.

Suddenly I thought, perhaps this here is hell.

Chapter 19 - From Within The Darkness (1)

It was a time like hell.

Summoning and un-summoning Sylph repeatedly, I ran, gasping for air. Compared to Kang Chun-seong and Joon-ho with his physical strength buff, my stamina was even worse than Park Go-chan's. But there was another who was gasping for air more than me, and that's Lee Hye-su.

She looked like the very breath would leave her and her face was strewn in tears.

On her severely fatigued and frightened face, her fear that her comrades may leave her behind was obvious.

I wanted to help her but I was barely keeping up as it was.

“Get on my back.”

Out of the ordinary, Kang Chun-seong interfered. Even with Lee Hye-su on his back he ran, leading the group.

As that happened, the person in last place became me.

“Hak, hak, haak...!”

It felt like my heart would explode. It was to the point that I

feared I would die running like this.

I kept going back and forth between hoping we have a battle or to just keep running.

-Meow!

Sylph's meow, with only 5 minutes left of her summon time, brought my dimming consciousness back to focus.

“Ah.....!”

I am in awe at the view before me. The flow of the small river is joined to a small waterfall. Below the waterfall was a gorge surrounded with rocks and inside it, slightly hidden by the waterfall, was a small cave.

“H-here....”

I was so out of breath the words didn't properly come out of my mouth.

“You're saying we should rest here, right?”

With his physical strength buff entry level 2, Joon-ho who was in better condition than I, asked me.

I nod my head.

We make our way down to the gorge. We go into the small cave behind the falling waterfall. It was small enough that as 5 people entered, it made us feel crowded.

But, perhaps due to the waterfall that blocked the entrance, it felt safe.

‘Thank goodness. If we fight here, it will be easier to block them.’

The waterfall will get rid of our body odor and stop it from going outside.

The passage through the gorge is narrow so even if they attack, the fight will be easier.

I un-summon Sylph and speak to the group.

“Let’s spend the day here.”

The group nods.

I make my gun and bullet pouch disappear and collapse onto the floor. Maybe it is just because of how tired I am, but as soon as I lay down, sleep floods over me.

When I come to, it is pitch black.

It is so dark I cannot see anything. All I hear is the soft breathing of my group.

As my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I could make out the interior of the cave.

What immediately catches my eye is Kang Chun-seong, sitting towards the entrance to the cave.

“You didn’t sleep?”

Kang Chun-seong barely glances at me and nods his head. It seems while everyone had fallen asleep from sheer exhaustion, he had kept watch all alone.

I summon my board to check the time.

-Name: Kim Hyun-ho

-Class: 3

-Karma: 0

-Mission: survive until the time

-Time limit: 5 days 9 hours 14 minutes

“You should go to bed now. We will keep sentry now.”

At the words, Kang Chun-seong immediately laid down and fell asleep.

“Sylph.”

-Meow.

“Shh, quietly.”

Sylph nods her head and rubs her face on me. At her adorableness, I feel my heart melting.

“Scout for me please.”

Sylph nods and flies out the cave.

She returns in a moment and draws a number in the ground. It is so dark I cannot really see.

“Can you draw it on my hand?”

Sylph draws a number into my right hand. Along with a tickle, I can make out the number 271.

“271 of them?”

Sylph nods her head.

All of the red apes, minus the ones we had killed during the day, are gathering outside and near to us. They are sure that we are somewhere nearby.

‘This situation is really not good.’

This place we had thought to be safe was actually not that good of a spot.

The falling waterfall is blocking the entrance so we cannot build a fire and because it is cold and moist, it is uncomfortable to sleep in. We cannot survive for five days in here.

We must escape this place.

But with what ability will we pierce through a net of 271 apes?

‘It’s making me depressed, so I’m going to stop thinking about it

for now.'

A while later, I wake the group, minus Kang Chun-seong, and decide on our sentry order. Between the four of us, we decide to each take turns of 1 hour 30 minutes.

**

“Get up, guy.”

Thanks to Park Go-chan tapping me with his feet, I'm awoken from my sleep.

“Man, fuck, it's so cold how am I going to get a proper sleep.”

Park Go-chan finishes his sentry duty and lays down mumbling. Complaining aside, he quickly starts to snore.

I spaced out for a good while and then kicked my sleepiness aside and summoned Sylph.

“Can you go see what the red apes are doing?”

-Meow.

She replied in a small voice and flies out.

Sylph returns in a moment and I ask her.

“Are the bastards sleeping?”

-Meow.

Sylph is nodding her head.

They have good night vision but they aren't nocturnal. That means last night's attack was a strategy.

“Are they all sleeping? If not, how many of them are awake?”

Sylph draws a ticklish number 9 on my palm.

‘Just 9?’

There are hundreds roaming about and there are only 9 that are awake and keeping watch? It's more pathetic than I thought.

But I can understand it. There are hundreds of them and this forest is their territory. They have never had to fear and so their watch is loose.

‘Should I use that to my advantage?’

I think about escaping with my group while the bastards are

asleep.

But that is indeed reckless.

No matter how pathetic, there is the chance that we will be caught by the 9 that are keeping watch. In addition, we are exhausted. Even if we break through their ranks, we won't be able to keep running while they chase us.

‘How did it come to this?’

I had thought things were going well and according to plan.

As we arrived in the forest, I had deduced that our enemy was the red ape. I had success in getting water and food. We were also ready for their night attack. Isn't this much pretty good?

But alas, in the end, we are locked in this tiny gorge.

‘The red apes’ teamwork surpasses my expectations.’

We killed all 21 of the apes that had ambushed us in the night attack, and didn't leave a single one able to return.

But after that, and not even within a full day, hundreds of them worked together to search the entire forest.

They quickly narrowed their search and eventually found our location.

We did break through the earlier search team, but in the end we have found ourselves in a corner.

‘This is a total mall hunt.’

The red apes’ group efforts were thoroughly organized and close.

The number that died at our hands is well over 40 and they weren’t a bit shaken up.

I am sure of it that they have a strong leader that has strong control of the group. A smart leader that knows how to night attack and mall hunt.

Let’s organize this.

First, a smart and strong leader.

Second, that leader has 271 red apes acting as his hands and feet.

Third, this forest is no different than their front lawn.

Fourth, in our group, one is a trouble maker and the other is incompetent.

‘What kind of bullshit exam is this?’

It’s making me angry. That bbundegi angel bastard! He may be looking at my anguish now and chuckling right now.

“Board retrieval.”

-Name: Kim Hyun-ho

-Class: 3

-Karma: 0

-Mission: survive the time limit

-Time limit: 5 days 3 hours 45 minutes

I stare blankly at the words on my board. I spent a good deal of time just staring at the board.

And suddenly, a thought popped into my head.

Survive until the time limit.

That is all. Now that I think of it, nowhere did it say to flee for a week. Just survive.

It wasn't an impossible mission. Like the first exam, they have given us a mission that is doable. Something that is possible with our skills.

Our skills.

My skill...

And then something passed by in my head, like a flash of light. I summon Sylph again.

“Sylph. I have something to ask you.”

-Meow?

Cute Sylph, looking at me with her round eyes.

“Using your power, can you make it so sound disappears?”

-Meow.

Sylph nods her head.

“Can you get rid of smell?”

-Meow.

She nods again.

“Then lastly, do you know what kind of bastard the leader of the red apes is? Like his appearance or if he’s giving out orders to other bastards. Maybe, have you seen him?”

-Meow.

Sylph nods her head this time too.

Ah.....

This is it. The answer was this close all along.

I wake up the next sentry, Lee Hye-su.

“Is it my turn?”

“Something has come up so I am waking you early.”

“What happened?”

“If I do not return within the hour, wake the others and escape.”

“What?”

“I will return.”

I head out the cave.

But Lee Hye-su follows after me.

“Where are you going!”

“I’m going to kill their leader. If I can do just that, the exam is clear.”

“And if you do not return?”

“If an hour passes and I am not back, escape before the day brightens. For now, the bastard’s watch is loose so you have a chance, but if I fail, they will be more vigilant and even in the night they will watch more closely. So you...”

“That’s not it!”

“....?”

“What about me.....”

Lee Hye-su is about to cry.

“What I was about to be molested, you helped me, you saved me during the fight, and you’ve taken care of me this and that way... Hyun-ho, you are the only one that has protected me. If you are not here, what will I do.”

At those words, my heart is deafened.

“Please do not go. Just stay here. Why do you have to submit to such danger?”

I let out a bitter smile.

“Would you like to talk for a while?”

We sit together on a boulder.

I ask “How old are you?”

“I’m 27.”

“How long have you been with a company?”

“This year marks 4 years.”

“Did you get hired as soon as you graduated?”

“Yes.”

“What kind of company is it?”

“I worked at the ST Soft marketing division.”

“Wow, you got into a big company right after graduating. You must’ve attended a good university.”

“The school wasn’t bad, but my dad is a ST Soft board member.”

“Wow, I’m so jealous. Your face is pretty and your house is well off, you had a very successful life.”

“It’s not so. Look at me now...”

“Better than me.” I speak up.

“Even if I say the name, people don’t know the university I went to and up to now, I’ve been saying that I’m studying for the civil servant exam and living as an unemployed person.”

“...”

“My college friends graduated and mailed off hundreds of resumes, and then the place they barely got hired at gives them a salary shy of \$20,000. Seeing that scared me. That I might face those hardships too. So I decided to be a civil servant and wasted my life until I was 29.”

I let out a deep sigh and continue.

“I have never been complimented for being good at anything. I never worked hard for anything and my life ended having lived just plain and mediocre. That’s why I’m working so desperately now. Because I want to live. So that if I am given another chance, that I might live my life properly. I’m pretty pitiful, huh?”

“N-no, you aren’t. You are really incredible, Hyun-ho. If it wasn’t for you, we would all be dead by now.”

“Thank you. For the first time in my life, I’ve gotten a compliment.”

I laugh and she laughs too.

Chapter 20 - Within The Darkness (Part 2)

“Do you remember the first day when Park Go-Chan and Kang Chun-seong almost fought?”

“How could I forget.”

“Do you remember what Kang Chun-seong said back then?”

“Oh, the eyeball...”

I laugh and nod my head.

“Yes, that. He said it’s something anyone can do but not everyone has the nerve to do.”

“Yes.”

“Hye-su, you will eventually have to do it too. You cannot be protected forever.”

“...”

“I know it is scary. I was terrified too. I still am. But try and cross that mountain. Once you cross it, you will be better than anyone else. Hye-su, you are capable of it.”

I stand up from my seat. I can't delay the time any longer.

"I will be off now."

"Ah...!"

Lee Hye-su stood up quickly and tried to dissuade me, but I marched on forward. And so I set off for the gorge.

As I left the gorge and entered the forest, I put on my bullet pouch and rifle, and summoned Sylph.

"From now on, get rid of all the noise I make."

-Meow.

I take a step.

Interestingly, the crunchy sound of stepping on grass was not made.

'Nice.'

With this, I can easily avoid the 9 apes standing guard.

"Guide me to where the leader is. Avoiding the awake apes as much as possible."

-Meow.

Sylph signaled she understood and hopped onto my shoulder, pointing the way with her paw. I walked in the direction my cute guide instructed me to.

I retrieved my board and checked on Sylph's remaining summon time in real time.

Getting rid of any noise was using her time twice as fast. The bigger a noise I make, the more power is used to get rid of that noise.

When I walk as softly as possible, the time given to me is about an hour. And so that is why I told her to escape if I was not back within the hour.

‘They will have a hard time without me. Plain as day.’

Not to mention food, but even with starting a fire they will suffer. I think to myself that when that time comes, even Park Go-Chan will long for me and it suddenly makes me laugh.

And Lee Hye-su.

‘You are the only one that has protected me.’

That I appeared righteous and brave to one woman makes me proud.

Of course in her shoes, my help was crucial to her survival.

But I don't think she calculated for that and used me. If she was a calculating woman, wouldn't she have flirted with me from the get go?

Seeing as how she didn't, Lee Hye-su is just a nice girl who grew up in a nice house, not wanting for anything.

Honestly, I liked her the moment I saw her, her pretty face, void of any primping. It's why I disliked Park Go-Chan even more. Taking care of her wasn't completely empty of an ulterior motive for me.

My insides boil at the thought that with me gone, Park Go-Chan may sexually harass her as he pleases.

'You think I'm doing some heroic sacrifice? I just want to go back to living.'

If I succeed in this task, I will have made the biggest contribution to clearing this exam and will earn a lot of karma. Not to mention it will make me more appealing to Lee Hye-su.

It is this double motivation that keeps me forging on.

Of course, the most important thing is my life.

I move carefully.

Not long after entering the forest, I can see the red apes. They were bunched together sleeping, here and there.

With Sylph's, help I weaved through the sleeping bastards and passed them.

My skin shivers, having to go right past the sleeping bastards. I feel my heart getting tense. If I take one wrong step and step on one, it's the end for me.

Then, Sylph taps me on the shoulder.

‘What is it?’

As I look at her, she points to the left. From the left, an awake red ape is strolling about.

I immediately lower my body and carefully move. I hide my body behind the bushes and continue on.

Sylph draws on my shoulder with her front paw.

There is 50 meters left until the leader.

40, 30, 20.....

The distance gets shorter.

At 15 meters, I put a lead bullet in the chamber. Using Sylph to quietly slit its throat is the best option but you never know, so I keep the gun loaded.

Then, 9 meters.

Hiding behind a thick tree, I look at the situation before me.

‘Is it that?’

The red apes’ leader is a bastard with an incredible build. His height looks similar to Kang Chun-seong, and its muscles are intense. He looks to be about three times as heavy as the other apes.

‘I wonder if he’s a mutated one?’

It it’s this much, he must’ve been destined to be the leader since the day he was born. Superior since birth, he must have a strong hold on the gang.

Nonetheless, all that's left to do is kill it.

Like a strong being, he sleeps in a big starfish shape, with all limbs out. He appears magnanimous in his sleep. I will let you sleep for eternity.

As far as obstacles go, near him are two red apes that are wide awake.

Leader, 2 guards.

I have to kill all three at once.

“Sylph, do you think you can slit all three of their throats at the same time?”

Sylph nods her head up and down.

“Okay. Slit them.”

-Meow.

She flew like the wind.

Chwak! Chwak! Kwajik-!

From all three of their necks, blood pour like a fountain.

‘It’s done!’

I gripped my fists and celebrated. I just have to quietly escape the way I came, but...

“Ki ruh ruhk!”

“Huh?”

I’m completely surprised.

The red ape leader bastard makes a sound like he’s coughing up phlegm from his blood pouring neck and wakes up. He hasn’t died?

The leader presses down on his blood gushing neck and gets up. His body is stumbling back and forth dangerously.

“Sylph, kill!”

I give out the order to Sylph.

But then, right at that moment.

“Ki eeeeeeeek-!”

The leader rips out a roar. At the same time, the blood goes ‘pu hak!’ and, as if exploding, pours out his neck. He falls backwards and stops breathing.

But the last roar he let out has already awoken all the red apes.

“Ki ek!”

“Ggi ek?”

“Ggi ik!”

From all around, the agitated voices of the red apes.

‘Aww shit!’

To have his throat cut and still let out a roar and wake everyone up! What the hell?

Now I am in the center of a hundred woken red apes.

“Board retrieval, skill review!”

-Spirit summon (Main skill). Lower level wind spirit is currently summoned.

*Level 1: Summons period 2 hours (Remaining time: 31 minutes.)

When the summon time is up, you may re-summon in 10 hours.

I only have 31 minutes of summon left.

‘What do I do now?’

My heart is pounding in horror. Amidst the danger, I desperately search my mind. A countermeasure, countermeasure, countermeasure!

‘Fuck, there is none! Just run!’

I start to run. Using Sylphs power, I run without a sound, quietly.

The bastards aren’t completely awake from their slumber, and haven’t realized the situation. The leader is dead and without anyone giving orders, they are bound to be muddled in confusion.

Using this time to run at full speed is the best option for right now.

“Ki ek!”

One bastard is face on in front of me.

‘Fuck, what are you looking at.’

I give him a pull of my loaded magic gun.

Puk!

Thanks to Sylph’s power, the gun doesn’t make a sound, and the only sound that is made is the dull thud when the lead bullet hits its skull.

As I run I load the gun again.

“Move!”

As the strange shrieks of the red apes spread through the forest, Lee Hye-su is in a sheer fright.

‘What do I do!’

It seems the red apes have all woken up at once. If Kim Hyun-ho hadn’t been caught, there wouldn’t be such a disturbance.

... Kim Hyun-ho will probably not be returning alive.

In a daze and not knowing what to do, Lee Hye-su suddenly remembers what Kim Hyun-ho had told her.

“Board retrieval.”

Retrieving the board and checking the time, almost an hour has passed. She heads inside the cave and wakes the rest of the group.

“What is it?”

“That, that is...”

At Joon-ho’s question, she doesn’t know how to respond and stumbles in her words.

“Hyu-Hyun-ho told us to immediately escape.”

“What?”

“What are you talking about?”

As Park Go-Chan asked of her, Lee Hye-su replied with a voice mixed into a cry.

“I think Hyun-ho is dead.”

She can barely relay the whole story to the shocked group.

“That shithole, who does he think he is to go out all alone and fuck himself, pfft, I didn’t like him from the beginning anyway.”

“Now is not the time to be saying things like that. Don’t you think we should hurry and escape?”

At Joon-ho’s words, Park Go-Chan waves his hand.

“In that big a commotion, going out will be more dangerous.”

“But, Hyun-ho hyung...”

“Hey, shit. You wanna talk back to me again?”

Park Go-Chan is eager to assume leadership and Joon-ho quickly shuts his mouth.

The group cannot come to a decision and stays flustered. Now that Kim Hyun-ho, who had made a practical leader, has disappeared, problems are already surfacing.

“Let’s go.”

It is Kang Chun-seong who had quietly been in silence, without a

word.

“He said to run if he didn’t come back within the hour. So we shall run.”

Kang Chun-seong thought it wise to follow Kim Hyun-ho’s request. Since it was Kim Hyun-ho’s good decision making that led them well to this point.

Park Go-Chan didn’t make a squeak and followed. And so they group left the gorge.

“Where should we go?” Asks Joon-ho.

Everyone is in silence.

Not that they think about it, the one who had decided where to go was always Kim Hyun-ho. Which direction should we go if we want to live? The person leading the way has to make those decisions constantly.

They realize the big difference in being in the front and just following in that footstep.

“Missus, in what direction did that bastard Kim Hyun-ho go?”

Park Go-Chan asks and Lee Hye-su points to the right.

“Then we should go in the opposite direction!”

Park Go-Chan shifts his walking to the left. The other three people don't have any other thoughts and so have no choice but to follow him.

Following from way in the back, Lee Hye-su felt an ominous foreboding.

Park Go-Chan decided the direction they should go, and the group decided to follow it. Park Go-CHAN's desire for leadership that Kim Hyun-ho had pressed down, is starting to come up again.

And Kang Chun-seong, who has the ability to suppress him, has no desire to assert his own leadership. It seems he doesn't want to deal with other people.

And Lee Joon-ho was weak, in strength and heart.

‘Hyun-ho, please come back alive. Please don't die.’

Lee Hye-su pleaded in her heart over and over.

Perhaps the focal point was the death of their leader, because the red apes did not chase after me.

Thanks to that I barely escaped alive but I cannot return to the gorge where the group is. It's because I cannot divulge their location because of me.

“Sylph, the bastards aren't chasing me anymore, right?”

-Meow.

Sylph was on my shoulder waving her tail back and forth, and replied. Now, Sylphs summon time is only 5 minutes left. It is fortuitous I was able to escape in that time.

“It's done...”

Breathing a sigh of relief, I look up at the sky.

It is still the dark night sky. But a ray of sunlight peeked through, calling on the morning.

“It's done! I did it, ku hahaha!”

I make two fists and rejoice.

When I think to myself, I cannot believe it. I secretly went in on my own, amidst hundreds of red apes, and killed their leader and escaped.

I did it!

The unemployed, almost 30-year-old, Kim Hyun-ho!

Chapter 21 - Murder (Part 1)

Now that their leader is dead, I wonder if they might now back off now.

Humans and animals, when they come into a group setting, they fight for power, and now that the leader is dead, they will probably pick a successor first. But that is no cause to relax, even for a moment.

‘If there was a second in command within the group, they may be able to organize the chaos really quickly. He may quickly become the new leader and chase us.’

Not settling for a hierarchy, but to demonstrate his strength, the second in command, who is placed in leadership, may hunt us down, this possibility is high.

Anyway, for now what is left is to rejoin the group.

‘Oh shoot. Now that I think of it, they should all be escaping now?’

I had said to run if I wasn’t back within the hour.

At the time, maybe it was because I was in front of a woman, but I felt like a hero, like a die-hard protagonist, and with that mentality in mind, had told her to run. Now that the time is here, I’m regretting it. I should have just told her to wait for me!

I finish resting and get up and go.

I did not forget to summon Sylph every five minutes as a guide and scout.

At the end of carefully running back, I arrive at the gorge with the waterfall.

“Sylph, the people?”

-Meow.

Sylph shakes her head.

“Then let’s see where they went by looking for footprints or something.”

At my order, Sylph quickly flew away and promptly returned, and with an adorable front paw, pointed to the left.

“Okay.”

From my end I have Sylph, so I should be able to catch up quickly.

They may all think I’m dead, I wonder what reaction they will

have when they see me. Never mind, I also want to brag about my achievement in having killed the ape leader too.

If I use this opportunity well, there might be a something-something with Lee Hye-su too. The atmosphere last night was alright, wasn't it? Haha.

I walk in with a spring in my step.

Lee Hye-su's foreboding was correct.

The new leader, Park Go-chan, was slowly letting his anger go rampant and unchecked.

"Keep up, faster, faster! We're not on a picnic, stupid bitch!"

Amidst the violent swearing, Lee Hye-su couldn't get in a word and just diligently walked on.

In the aftermath of yesterday, she has blisters on her feet. The tennis shoes she wore in preparation for the exam were actually worse for wear in the forest and mountain terrain.

'Hyun-ho was wearing trekking shoes. This is why.'

He was a thorough man. He was meticulous and careful too.

He did not walk just of his own accord like Park Go-chan. He took into account her pace and had adjusted accordingly. When she was tired, he even said let's rest and continue.

She didn't know then.

She now realizes how considerate he had been for her.

'I miss you...'

Tears come to her.

She had only been concerned for her own safety. If Kim Hyun-ho dies, there will be no one to protect her; that is all she had thought.

But as time passed, she kept thinking about the kind of man Kim Hyun-ho was.

Escaping the front lines of employment and nearly 30, he had lived unemployed and was a man who regarded himself as pitiful because of it.

In Lee Hye-su's eyes, he was just an average guy. He was not strong from the beginning. He would have been unwelcome to the violence, and must have been a normal guy stricken in fear.

Every second of every minute he must have been scared.

But he had persevered and won through.

‘Even through all that, he had been considerate to me.’

He was indeed a good guy.

It was a cruel thing indeed to only realize so after his death.

“Ack!”

A blister popped and a sharp pain and irritation flooded her at once. Lee Hye-su’s legs gave way and she collapsed, sitting on the floor.

“What is it?”

Park Go-chan’s voice is full of annoyance. Lee Hye-su ends up bursting into tears.

“Hu hu huk...!”

“Um, are you okay?”

Joon-ho approaches her and asks her concernedly.

Lee Hye-su takes off her tennis shoes. Joon-ho lets out a shout. Her sock is drenched in blood.

“Fucking bitch, you really got all sorts of shit problems.”

Lee Hye-su feels a sudden surge of anger.

She had not done anything so terrible to warrant such curses. Why it has become such a natural thing for her to receive such verbal abuse from a human like that, it was unjust and angering.

‘I know it is scary. I was so scared too. I still am. But persevere a bit more and cross that mountain.’

Kim Hyun-ho’s words suddenly pop into her head.

‘A bastard like you has no right to be this way to me! Don’t speak as if I have to thank you for saving me!’

The boiling rage inside her led her to courage.

“... just go.”

“What?”

“Just leave me and go. Then its problem solved.”

“Should I just leave you then? You want to turn into ape food, huh?!”

“I don’t want to live, so just go!”

Her yelling, full of hate, spread out loud and resonated. Park Go-chan’s face shows he is perplexed.

Lee Hye-su glares up at Park Go-chan.

“A good person like Hyun-ho died! I don’t know why I have to live suffering like this. Why should I when a person who was so kind and who worked so hard to live, has died!”

“What, what is this bitch saying?”

Park Go-chan stumbles on his words.

Without a desire to live, there was no reason for her to be weak under Park Go-chan anymore.

The rage that had compounded inside her just erupts.

“And you! Did you think I couldn’t make out your clear intentions? That you would keep swearing and threatening and bothering me, and then later sweet talk to me, that I would fall for it? If I die, I’d rather just die than be with you, motherfucker!”

“This, this fucking bitch!”

Park Go-chan summons his sword and arms his right hand with it. Even so, the once erupted Lee Hye-su was not scared at all.

“Oh, just kill me then. You want to rape me then kill me? That’s all that’s in your dumb skull! But you know what? You think you’ll be safe doing that shit to another examinee?”

“W-what?”

At the unexpected stab, Park Go-chan is flustered.

“You’re just strong in the fucking mouth but you’re just as useless as me. Actually, you were just being distracting! In my opinion, never mind a prize, but I think you’ll get a punishment instead? Go ahead and kill me! Let’s see if you’re safe then! Kill me!”

“You bitch!”

Jjak!

“Ack!”

As Park Go-chan slaps her across the face, she falls over.

But the one with a bad expression on their face is Park Go-chan.

‘Penalty?’

Her words have weight.

To be honest, aside from Kim Hyun-ho and Kang Chun-seong, no one was really helpful.

At least Lee Joon-ho has good cooperation. Park Go-chan himself only caused problems. He himself is aware of it.

In a fight he only barely survived, and didn’t make a big contribution. Overall, he may be less help than Lee Hye-su. At least she cooked and did the chores.

He had completely forgotten about it.

That the angel was grading their exam.

Lee Hye-su who had fallen over laughed manically.

“There is an angel, I hope there is a heaven and hell. It’s obvious where you’ll end up.”

The word ‘hell’ made Park Go-chans heart shake ever more.

“I’m not going. Seeing hell here, I’m going to just die and go to heaven. At least I lived my life kindly!”

After puking out all her feelings, Lee Hye-su leans up her back against a tree.

Park Go-chan didn’t know what to do and awkwardly just stood there, and Lee Joon-ho tactfully stared at the two.

And then,

“Let’s rest here.”

It was Kang Chun-seong who had opened his mouth.

As usual, without enthusiasm and an expressionless expression, he continued to speak.

“They aren’t chasing us.”

“Oh, now that I look at it...”

Joon-ho now realizes that for a while now, the red apes haven’t been pursuing them. And in the forest, the red apes are much faster than them too.

Kang Chun-seong hangs out on top of a boulder.

Lee Joon-ho too looks around and then sits where he stands and rests.

In the end, they decide to camp here for the day.

But there is a problem.

“What do we do about a meal?”

There is no one with a reply for Lee Joon-ho’s answer.

Burn, burn.

My rabbit is grilling nicely.

It would be nice if there was some salt, but there is no such luxury as being able to eat this all by myself.

‘I wonder if, right about now, all of them are starving?’

No way. I’m sure they found some fruit, or at least caught a fish from the brook and ate it. There’s four of them, they wouldn’t starve just because I’m not there, would they?

I originally thought I would be able to catch up to them before the evening.

But killing the leader and escaping right after has used a lot of my energy and thus, my walking speed became much slower, and eventually, I had come to the conclusion that I must set up camp alone.

‘Is Lee Hye-su be okay?’

Now that I’m not there, Park Go-chan probably took up leadership. Joon-ho is very passive, and Kang Chun-seong is still closed off to a strange degree.

I can easily picture Park Go-chan walking in the front and dissing Lee Hye-su.

‘He probably thinks I’m dead and he will be in extra high spirits because of it.’

After talking last night with just the two of us, my feeling towards Lee Hye-su have evolved to become a bit more than just simple fondness.

Am I lonely because I’m alone?

Sitting alone in front of the fire, I keep thinking of her.

How nice would it be if she were sitting right beside me now. I imagine the image of us two sitting here by the fire, and promising each other to join forces and survive.

‘This won’t do.’

I pack away my half eaten rabbit and get up from my seat. I put out the fire and began to walk again.

Never mind a meal, the fire is barely started. After hours of trial and error, the fire was barely lit.

The tired group decide on their sentry order and fall asleep early.

Lee Joon-ho finishes the first sentry and changes shift with Lee Hye-su.

“How is your foot?”

“Well...”

“Good luck. If something happens, wake us up right away.”

Lee Hye-su nods her head. Lee Joon-ho falls asleep and she passes

the time, alone, staring at the flames of the fire.

She remembers the day's events.

It was the first time in her life she ever let out such rage at someone.

In those moments, her soul felt free but as time passed it became uncomfortable. It is not guilt. Thinking about what she had endured under Park Go-chan, those curses were not enough.

It is just that due to it, a conflict had emerged.

Not knowing how Park Go-chan's grudge would take its revenge made her nervous and fearful.

‘Why do I have to endure such...’

At her own situation, the tears come.

It was a car accident.

After working late and on her way home, she had crashed into a reckless passenger car. And when she came to, she was in a blank white world and met the baby angel. That's how she became an examinee.

After finishing the first exam and returning to reality, she was in the hospital. It was the doctor's opinion that she was miraculously not hurt anywhere.

Today in particular, she kept thinking how it would have been if she had gave up on the exam and just went on her way to the road to the afterlife.

Passing the time thinking depressing thoughts, Lee Hye-su got up to take care of some business.

Being the only girl, she had to be tactful when taking care of her period needs. That's why she tended to hold it all in and take care of business at night.

Lee Hye-su left the fire and goes off into the forest for a moment.

Then...

Park Go-chan opens his eyes.

‘Bitch, finally, there she goes.’

With a nasty grin on his face, Park Go-chan tip toes in the direction she disappeared in.

Chapter 22 - Murder (Part 2)

Lee Hye-su escaped to a dark and remote place and once again, carefully looked around her surroundings. Being alone in the dark of night gave her a creepy feeling.

It seemed like no one was there but Lee Hye-su could not relax.

The red apes like to hide and ambush. They did so in the first exam and they did so the second time when they ambushed on the first night of the second exam. There is nothing to say they won't do it again.

But then.

Ddook-

The sound of a twig being stepped on and broken. It is small, but the sound was definitely heard.

“Who, who is it!

Gripped in immense fear, Lee Hye-su firmly grasps her spear. The question is: will she be able to properly wield the shoddy spear that Kim Hyun-ho had made her.

No one came from the place the sound came from. But now she could feel that someone was definitely there.

She stabs in the direction with her spear and with a shaky voice, Lee Hye-su yells out.

“I said come out!”

“For a bitch who wants to die, you’re scared shitless!”

A familiar voice rang out.

‘Park Go-chan!’

It is not a red ape, but Lee Hye-su is actually more frightened now.

Park Go-chan walks out.

He is holding his sword in his right hand. Due to the darkness, his face is hard to make out. But he is sure to be wearing a nasty grin.

“Wha-what?”

“What do you mean what, bitch. You said you want to get fucked and go to heaven? So I came to send you to heaven.”

Park Go-chan is chuckling.

“Get away!”

“You should speak formally to your elder. Or you might die and end up in hell.”

“Hell is for you!”

“I just won’t die then.”

Park Go-chan wields up his sword and continues to speak.

“I thought about it carefully and I can’t undo all the bad things I chose to do so far in my life. So I thought. Ah, I guess I just won’t die, then.”

“...!”

“I’m just saying, I just have to finish this shit exam and live to the end. No matter what kind of bastard I am, I just have to finish the exam. Isn’t that why they called me here in the first place? Huh?!”

“S-so?”

“Fucking bitch, if you had just submissively crawled around like you should have, you wouldn’t be in this foul situation, no? Did you think that bastard Kim Hyun-ho would keep on protecting you? The world is as you see, its guys who pretend to be strong like

that that die first!”

Park Go-chan abruptly charges at her.

“Kyak!”

Lee Hye-su screams and lifts her spear.

Skuk!

At the swishing sword, her spear is futilely cut. And then Park Go-chan’s fist strikes Lee Hye-su.

“Aak!”

Lee Hye-su effortlessly falls over.

Park Go-chan’s entry level 3 physical strength buff was at level she could not handle.

Park go chan sat on her fallen body. He grabbed both her hands, desperately flailing, and yelled.

“It may feel like shit, but the bastards who live to the end are the guys like me! Got it? You fucking bitch!”

Puuk! Puk!

“Aak!”

At the ruthless punching, Lee Hye-su face swelled up.

Park Go-chan starts taking off her shirt. Lee Hye-su screamed and resisted, but the shirt was roughly ripped apart by his hands.

And then.

“Halt-!”

Park Go-chan’s hands freeze momentarily.

‘What?’

A familiar voice. A voice he thought he’d never hear again.

It has been two hours since I chased after my group’s tracks.

Sylph returns from scouting and tells me that the group is at a distance of 900 meters away.

“Not much must have happened to them. Did Hye-su look okay?”

But then Sylph shakes her head at my question.

“What? What is it?”

I ask like that and Sylph has no way to answer that kind of question.

“Is she hurt?”

Shake, shake.

“Then has she been attacked?”

Now Sylph nods her head. From that moment on I run like crazy.

“Is it a red ape?”

I ask as I run. Sylph shakes her head. Then...

It's no school field, and trying to run through a forest is difficult and I feel like my breath will leave me. I grit my teeth and keep on running.

“Sy-sylph, huk (gasp)! Park Go-chan, now, huk! Attack Hye-su?”

I pant and barely get to ask and Sylph nods her head.

“Huk, huk, how many meters are left?”

Sylph draws the number 642. Damn! At this rate, I may be too late.

...Hold on?

The distance that Sylph can be apart from me is 900 meters, right? So that means she can exercise her powers within that 900 meters?

I pause my running for a moment and catch my breath and ask Sylph.

“Can you attack Park Go-chan from here?”

-Meow.

Sylph shakes her head.

Of course.

They said the further a spirit gets from the summoner, the weaker it gets. Even if she does attack, it seems it won't do any damage to Park Go-chan.

But then is there no other way?

I roll through my head and an idea pops up.

“Sylph, can you deliver my voice to them?”

-Meow!

Sylph nods.

‘It’s possible!’

I think maybe, and I ask again.

“Then can you deliver their voice to me too?”

-Meow.

She nods again.

‘Impossible!’

I am once again surprised at Sylph’s usefulness. The wind spirit is an incredible means of long distance communication!

“Sylph, then will you deliver my words to Park Go-chan and Hye-su?”

-Meow.

Now, in a loud voice I yell ‘halt!’

Sylph delivers my message and returns and I continue to yell.

“Any bullshit, and I’ll shoot! I’m aiming at your head!”

I yell that and then ask Sylph to deliver Park Go-chan’s message back to me.

It is, of course, crap.

My magic rifle distance range is just 60 meters. But my bluff definitely has an effect.

“Where are you?!”

Sylph delivers Park Go-chan’s voice to me. The alarmed Park Go-chan’s voice it is clear as if he is right next to me. Interesting, indeed.

“Where? If I pull the trigger it will hit your head!”

“Co-come out!”

“I don’t want to?”

“You’ll shoot me? You think you can?”

“Yeah, I can shoot.”

“Haha, yeah right. You ever kill a person before? You’ll shoot me?”

“I’ve killed plenty that are close to human. If I shoot, whether it’s your skull or a red ape’s skull, I think the exploding will be the same.”

“ ... ”

Maybe the threat worked because Park Go-chan, out of fear, does not reply.

He has no way of knowing that I am still more than 500 meters away.

“Sylph, is he holding a weapon?”

-Meow.

“Okay.”

I yell at Park Go-chan again.

“Hand over the weapon to Hye-su. Try any bullshit and I’ve told Sylph to cut you.”

“Hey, let’s not do this, how about a bargain?”

“...?”

“You’re real interested in her too. I know it all. So what are you waiting for? You think if you keep helping her out and being a pushover, she’ll say thanks and give it up once? Bastard, don’t get used and choose the right side here. How about it?”

I am at a loss for words. He’s so dirty I don’t even want to keep exchanging words. I just want to go ahead and shoot him but I can’t so I have to keep talking.

“That’s an interesting suggestion.”

“Haha, isn’t it?”

“Hand over the weapon to Hye-su and back away.”

“You fucking dumbass!”

“The dumbass is you. You’re pulling shit like this when our lives are at stake?”

“ ... ”

I ask Sylph.

“Can you whisper so that only Hye-su can hear me?”

-Meow.

Sylph nods her head. Wow, really convenient.

I deliver my words to Hye-su.

“Miss Hye-su, get away from that bastard. Hurry and come this way. Sylph will show you which way.”

Moments later, Sylph alerts me that she is coming my way. Alright. Success at getting her away from Park Go-chan.

“Fine, now we good?”

“What do you mean good? Did you think I would just move on like all this never happened?”

“So, what are you going to do about it, bastard?”

“What do you think?”

“Yo-you’re going to kill me? A fellow examinee? You’re not scared of the penalty?”

‘Penalty?’

I haven’t thought of that before.

‘Now that I think of it, when I finished the first exam and received my karma, it was marked as +500. Does this mean there can be a minus (-) too?’

It is a complete possibility. I hesitate on how to handle Park Go-chan.

The distance is now shrunk to 200 meters. From afar I can see Lee Hye-su, panting and running. It is dark so I cannot make out her face but I am sure she is shaking in horror.

“Over here.”

“Hyun-ho!”

Lee Hye-su ran straight into my arms. And she explodes into

tears.

She is holding the sword; it seems Park Go-chan handed her his weapon upon my request. Thinking about it though, when he disarms his weapons it will just disappear, I didn't think this through very well.

I am completely surprised but I tap her on the back.

“You're okay now.”

“Uh hu hu huk!”

I calm Lee Hye-su who is crying in my embrace, and I speak to Park Go-chan.

“Leave this place!”

“What?”

“I said, leave this place. From now on, you will act independently from the rest of us.”

“You want me to act alone? That's telling me to die!”

“Then shall I stoke a fire and prepare meals for you? As if nothing has happened? I can't do that. So get lost. Whether you

live or die, take care of it on your own.”

“Hey, let’s not do this and make up. I was wrong. I wasn’t in my right mind. You know? You do crazy things when you’re in a panic.”

“You must’ve been in a panic your entire life then?”

“You fucker! So what do you want me to do? If you tell me to go off alone, then that’s nothing more than telling me to die! You think you’ll still be safe! You think after this exam we won’t cross paths again in the next one?”

Park Go-chan brazenly replies.

The distance dwindles down and I am less than 100 meters away. If I walk a little more, I will be within shooting distance.

“Hey guy, I said I was sorry. I’ll turn over a new leaf so let’s try this one more time. You and me, we’re both people that have already died once. Let’s not live-or-die with each other.”

“ ... ”

What should I do?

He seems sure that I don’t have it in me to murder him. That’s why the bastard tried to rape a girl and is brazenly trying to stay

with the group still.

It can't happen.

I have to shoo him off. But since he is so bent on sticking around, I have no choice but to kill him.

Do I really have to kill him?

And then.

Grip.

Lee Hye-su grabs my hand.

“Please do it.”

“Do what?”

“Kill him.”

At her words, my heart clunks down.

Her two hands holding mine are trembling.

“I am so miserable I want to die. I can never see his face again.

I'm terrified. I would rather die myself. Please, I beg you. Please save me."

"..."

I clench my teeth.

I can see Park Go-chan now. Approximately, 40-50 meters.

I take out the magic rifle. I load a lead bullet. I place the butt of the rifle against my shoulder, and I set the sights on Park Go-chan's head.

Thankfully it is dark and I cannot make out his face. If I had seen the expression on his face, I would not be able to pull the trigger.

Lee Hye-su is tightly holding onto the end of my shirt. As if it was the very life-line that was saving her.

Okay.

Let's think of it that way.

In place of killing Park Go-chan, I am saving Lee Hye-su. Because if I have to pick one to save, it is Lee Hye-su.

Toong-

“Kuk!”

Then that’s it.

Chapter 23 - Evaluation (Part 1)

“Hyung!”

Jun-ho sees me and his expression is extremely glad. Kang Chun-seong is awake too. He may have woken up from the sound of the shot.

Jun-ho sees Lee Hye-su follow behind me and his face freezes.

I too can now make out Lee Hye-su’s face from the light of the campfire.

‘Aw, damn.’

Her face is pitifully swollen. She was beaten senseless by Park Go-chan. That bastard!

I hold down my boiling rage and speak.

“We were attacked by red apes on our way over. Thankfully we handled them but sadly, Park Go-chan didn’t make it.”

“ ... ”

A chilly silence falls on us.

The awfully beaten Lee Hye-su, the gunshot, Park Go-chan's death. Joon-ho and Kang Chun-seong have no way of knowing what these things imply.

“Moreover, let's rest. You guys eat?”

“Uh, no, not yet.”

Joon-ho awkwardly stumbled out a reply. I take out the half eaten portion of grilled rabbit I had placed in my pocket earlier.

“Okay, for now, eat this. We will properly hunt and eat tomorrow.”

“Wow, thank you.”

“Miss Hye-su, come sit down and eat too.”

“Yes...”

Lee Hye-su sits down next to me and takes a chunk of grilled rabbit.

“Here.”

I throw a piece to Kang Chun-seong as well. He catches it and asks me.

“How did the thing you left to go do go?”

“I succeeded in killing their leader. Seeing as how after that none of them chased after me, I don’t think we have to worry about the red apes anymore.”

“Wow, hyung you’re really amazing!”

“What do you mean I’m amazing. It’s all thanks to Sylph.”

“But still. How did you think to barge in alone and kill their leader? It’s really amazing. You’re going to get so much karma when this exam is over.”

“Yeah, thanks. Anyway, tomorrow when the day brightens, let’s move to a safe location spend the remaining time with our hearts calm.”

“Okay.”

We finish our meal and go back to sleep.

“I will be the sentry. It’s because I can’t sleep. You should all sleep.”

“Hyung, you must be the most tired.”

“It’s okay. It’s because I can’t sleep.”

“Then I’ll head off to bed. If you get tired, just wake me up.”

“Alright.”

Everyone goes to sleep and I think to myself in the silence.

‘I’m sure he’s dead.’

I am sure he’s dead. Because I saw him spewing blood from his neck and fall over.

I could not find the courage and didn’t verify Park Go-chan’s body. I just took Lee Hye-su and spun back around to here.

...I killed a person.

The corpse of the person I just killed will still be in its place. It will be neglected there for all eternity. Who knows, a red ape or some other beast may come upon it and eat it.

And so the life of the man named Park Go-chan ended. At my hand.

I look down at my right hand.

It's shaking.

The sensation of pulling on the trigger has still not disappeared.

I become miserable at the thought that this sensation might never leave my memory.

I did nothing wrong.

He was deserved to die. He was someone who, had I let live, might have taken his revenge on me when I wasn't looking. Had he been a man of good priorities, he would not have tried to rape a comrade during an exam of life and death.

He was a bastard that lived just as he pleased. If only but for the purposes of going forward in the exams, I could not let him live.

'Yep, I did nothing wrong.'

I think that in my head but my heart feels different.

I recall Park Go-chan's voice that shook in fear at my threats.

He did.

Even human trash like him, he didn't want to die. He wanted to

live. A person like that, I ended his life. I pulled the trigger with this finger...

I clench my hand into a fist.

The shaking doesn't go away.

"Are you okay?"

Lee Hye-su's voice brings me back from my distraction. She is looking at me with worried eyes.

"Yes, I'm okay."

She gets up from her seat and comes close to me.

She grabs my hand with both of hers.

There is a certain warmth to them.

The light from the fire reflects on her face, where the puffiness hasn't dissipated. It hurts my heart. How could he just beat a woman so. He was a motherfucker. I did good to kill him. I saved this woman.

"Really, thank you."

“No worries.”

“And I’m sorry. Because of me...”

“No, don’t be. I had thought I should kill him too. I just couldn’t because I didn’t have the courage to. I only found the courage thanks to you.”

I am holding her hand and it strangely makes the shaking go away.

We stayed that way for a while. Holding hands. Using hands to exchange our heat, that quiet time, it felt so good it almost felt strange. Like frozen snow that melts, my heart warms up.

“Do you want to go?”

“Where?”

“To him.”

I am startled at her words.

“There is... nothing good to come of looking at the corpse.”

“No. In my opinion I think it will be worse to move on without seeing the body.”

She continues to speak in a shaky voice.

“Is he really dead, what about the body, is he actually alive and plotting revenge... these thoughts won't go away. You too, right?”

“... yes.”

“So let's go together. Let's verify that he really is dead and give him a proper burial. I'm too scared to go alone but I think I'll be okay if you come with me.”

Her words are right.

To just go on, I may never be able to forget Park Go-chan. I have to tie the knot for sure and move on.

“Okay, let's go. But what should we dig the grave with?”

“I'm not sure. Um, would this not work?”

She shows me the sword. Its Park Go-chan's sword.

“Huh, its owner died and it's still here.”

“I know.”

“Can you try saying ‘weapon cancel?’”

“Weapon cancel?”

Then,

Pat! Goes the sword and disappears.

Her and I both are surprised.

“It, it disappeared?”

“This time, try saying ‘equip.’”

“Equip.”

As she said it, the sword appeared in her right hand. With her eyes wide open, Lee Hye-su speaks.

“Why is this following my commands?”

“I’m not really sure.... What...”

In an instant, I understand what must be happening.

‘Hand over the weapon to miss Hye-su.’

That's it! Back then, Park Go-chan handed the sword over to Lee Hye-su, and that transferred the ownership.

I explain this to Lee Hye-su.

“So then this is mine now?”

“Yes, you didn't have a weapon, this is fortuitous.”

“I'm not sure if I can use this. It's very heavy. Why don't you or Joon-ho use it instead...”

“But still, for now, hold on to it. It's difficult to use now because it's heavy, but later when you get the physical strength buff, you'll be able to use it.”

We go to where Park Go-chan died.

We are able to see his dead body.

He is effortlessly strewn on the ground, on ground that is drenched in blood. A surprised expression on his face and a red hole in his neck.

I had no confidence in facing the body, but now that I have, it's not as scary as I thought it would be.

‘Miss Hye-su, it’s a good thing we came like you suggested.’

If I had run away without seeing this, it might have remained as a scary memory forever.

“Let’s start. I’ll go first.”

“Okay.”

I receive the sword from her and start to dig. I continue the job of hammering into the ground and digging out the dirt.

Taking turns with Lee Hye-su, as the sun rose bit by bit, in the early morning, a decent hole was dug. We shove Park Go-chan into it and bury him.

I use Sylph to make a gravestone out of a thick branch. I engrave it ‘Park Go-chan’ and place it on top of the grave.

“There was no other option. Live more kindly in the next life.”

I say those simple words and take a moment of silence. Was that too cocky? But I have nothing else in particular to say. His bad luck is all of his own doing.

Lee Hye-su closes her eyes too and takes a moment of silence. I wait, without a word, until she is done.

“It’s done now.”

She opens her eyes and lets out a big smile. I think to myself that even though her face is swollen purple, her smile is still quite attractive.

We head back together to the campfire. We sit next to each other and share all kinds of stories.

We exchange stories of our lives and she was indeed a girl who grew up in a wealthy and happy family, living a comfortable life and grew up as an intelligent lady.

Perhaps for those reasons but she found the stories of my family to be incredibly entertaining. A mean older sister and an obnoxious younger sister that likes to party, a cute mother obsessed with her son. This and that, lots of stories came out.

And so we talked not knowing time passing by, when she said this.

“Actually, I have something to confess.”

“What is it? Just say.”

“That is, I, I told a lie.”

At those words, I smiled.

“You mean when you said you had the entry level 1 physical strength buff?”

“Oh, how did you know?”

I talk to a surprised her.

“Your physique is lower than mine so there was no way I wouldn’t have known.”

“I’m so sorry. I didn’t want to be labelled as a total burden to the team with having absolutely no power... even though that’s how it ended up. Just being a pain for everyone.”

“There is no need to think that way. Just think of my aid as an investment in the future.”

“Investment?”

“Yes, you may be weak now, but you will receive karma and grow your skills and be able to make your rightful contributions. So, for now, just think of yourself as a probationary employee.”

“Thank you.”

“Anyway, how much karma did you get in the first exam? You came without a skill, let alone a weapon, so it does seem weird.”

“Honestly...”

She fussed and waited, and then Lee Hye-su spoke.

“-50.”

“...huh?”

“-50.”

“If a minus...”

“I did not succeed in the first exam.”

Lee Hye-su tells an astonished me the whole story.

Simply put, she was not able to defeat the red ape but she wasn't killed by it either. She had resisted and ran and fought back and when the 30 minutes were barely up and the exam door appeared, she made a run for it.

“I guess that means failing the exam doesn't mean you die.”

“Yes, but I was fearful the whole time about how the minus

would affect me.”

“Don’t worry. You will be able to make up for the minus with this exam.”

“But there is nothing I did for this exam either. What will I do if I don’t keep getting stronger and just stay a burden?”

She is nervous and I pat her on the shoulder.

“Do not worry too much. The way I see it, fighting isn’t everything to the exam. There is definitely a role you can assume in different areas. Just find those areas and earn enough karma to get the skills. Until then, I will protect you.”

“Hyun-ho...”

She seems moved and stares at me.

“What will I do. Always just getting help from you...”

“I do have one request, will you grant it?”

“Yes, whatever it is.”

At her ‘whatever’ I immediately think a dirty thought. I’m such a bastard!

I do a fake cough and speak.

“Just call me oppa. It’s a bit toe-curling hearing Hyun-ho, Hyun-ho.”

Lee Hye-su lets out a short burst of laughter.

“Got it. Then Hyun-ho, I mean oppa, you lower your speech to me too.”

“Yes. I mean, kay.”

We look at each other and laugh shyly.

Chapter 24 - Evaluation (Part 2)

The remaining time flowed flatly. We passed the time smoothly without any threat to our lives.

The biggest danger we did get was just some rain. We had to take our rain drenched bodies back to the cave by the ravine we were at before. Thankfully, the hundreds of red apes that were in the nearby area had all gone and left.

Now that Park Go-chan was gone, it was peaceful.

Hye-su and Joon-ho decided to go brother-sister relationship and the three of us became close. The closed up Kang Chun-seong was his usual self.

Anyhow, after that day, Lee Hye-su became different. She tried her hardest at everything.

As soon as I caught a rabbit, she learned from me on how to butcher it. She didn't blink an eye and cut the ankles and flipped off the hide.

Not only that, but she did all the cooking and even brought a bunch of berries that she found while she was out gathering kindle.

As the uneventful free time grew, Kang Chun-seong started practicing his martial arts. Joon-ho began exercising and Hye-su

continually searched the forest for things to eat like fruit.

I had time to organize and understand the skills that Sylph and I learned from this exam.

First, long distance communication.

Using Sylph to deliver speech is possible within a distance of 900 meters. It can be made to only be heard by one person as well.

Second, sound removal.

It is a skill to move around discretely by getting rid of noise. Using this, I was able to infiltrate the gang of red apes and kill their leader.

Third, smell removal.

It's a way to eradicate my odor from passing through the air. Using the sound removal and the smell removal together, I was able to successfully catch a rabbit with my bare hands, the effect is that good.

Fourth, oxygen concentration.

It's a way to concentrate the oxygen to make it easier to light a fire, but I am also thinking that I could concentrate it to create explosives in a fight. For example, I concentrate the oxygen then

throw a torch out.

Fifth, wind knife.

It is a good, viable way to attack while in close range. I passed many dangers with this. It causes a lot of damage so it uses a lot of strength, so I can only really use it when I really need it.

‘I’m only alive thanks to Sylph.’

Sylph’s incredible usefulness!

I consider myself so lucky that I chose the spirit summon as my main skill.

Things like aura control are very useful for martial artists like Kang Chun-seong but it wouldn’t be much help to a layperson like me.

And we passed by the remaining time like this and then in front of the cave, the exam door appeared.

“Wow. It’s finally over.”

Joon-ho had a moved expression on his face.

“The first thing I’m going to do when I get back is take a bath”

said Hye-su.

Then again, we didn't really have a way to properly wash while we've been here.

Couldn't change our underwear or socks so we're sure to feel a bit grimy.

“Let's go.”

I lead the pack and open the exam door and go through.

Boo boo boooo

“Wow! Congratulations!”

Here we go again.

The bbundegi bastard is blowing on his horn and disorientingly flitting about here and there.

And it isn't only me, but everybody else is looking at the obnoxious childish baby angel with unkind gazes.

It's only natural to be filled with rage after suffering like a dog then returning to see this shit show.

“You all are looking at me with such loving eyes. Did you miss me that much?”

The baby angel has a way of pouring gasoline on the fire of rage.

“You bastard. Stop that and hurry up and evaluate us.”

At my words, the baby angel shrugs his shoulders.

“But the evaluation is already done? Check your boards.”

“Board retrieval”

Class: 5

Karma: +900

Mission: Survive the time limit (complete)

Time limit: –

5 class, 900 karma. Is this a good grade? I wonder what other people got?

“It is indeed a good grade.”

The baby angel abruptly shoves his face up to mine.

At that, I get startled and take a step back and grind my teeth.

“Would you not just read my thoughts and abruptly interrupt me?”

At that, the baby angel chews (ignores) my words and turns the conversation around.

“Examinee Kim Hyun-ho again sets the record. In the 2nd exam, of all examinees ever, you have received the greatest score.”

“The best grade ever? Me?”

“Yes. There has never been an examinee that has received 900 karma until now”

“900 karma.”

“Oh wow.”

Everyone exclaims and looks at me

The baby angel looks away and continues to speak.

“You’ve earned as much karma as the other examinees combined. My eyes didn’t deceive me. I told you that you are a person that is capable of it.”

“...”

“Look at your contributions in the exam. You infiltrated in the dead of night, killed the red ape Rode, and you got rid of the uncooperative person who kept being a negative distraction to the team.”

Negative distraction. That is the description for Park Go-chan.

“Every moment, every second, your decision making and actions were very definitive and calculated. What average human would be able to do as examinee Kim Hyun-ho did? Now do you realize that you aren’t just an average person, but a very special human indeed?”

“...”

I have nothing to reply back with. The inside of my head is complicated. I was sure of the fact that I had to kill Park Go-chan. The fact that he tried to rape Lee Hye-su was a good opportunity for it. A good opportunity to cross the threshold of murder...

Perhaps I am like the baby angel said and I’m not like the average person. Even though I have thought myself a plain, weak, and slightly pitiful person.

“Now now, shall we evaluate the others? Examinee Kang Chun-seong, examinee Lee Joon-ho, and examinee Lee Hye-su earned 400, 300, 200 karma respectively.”

3 people’s score really is my grade. But Kang Chun-seong’s grade is lower than I thought it would be. I wonder why.

“How much of your strength did you use, how much did you contribute to clearing the mission? The grade evaluates these 2 things. In these respects, examinee Kang Chun-seong.”

The baby angel flapped his wings and approached Kang Chun-seong.

“You were wondering this because your grade was lower than you thought it would be.”

“Indeed.”

“Your role was a big help in getting your group past danger. But on the other hand, you were a distraction in clearing the mission.”

“Distraction?”

Kang Chun-seong’s brow furrows.

“How did you leave Park Go-chan’s actions alone? Was it not a problem that could’ve been solved by a single word from you?”

“...”

“Of course, not doing everything you possibly could have done isn’t automatic grounds for deduction but examinee Kang Chun-seong was definitely a distraction for your group relationship.”

It was at Kang Chun-seong’s questioning face that the baby angel continued his explanation.

“You suppressed examinee Park Go-chan but after that, with your disinterested behavior, you allowed the disorganized group ranking to continue and let Park Go-chan be a conflicting factor.”

“What do you mean?”

“If you weren’t present, the ranking would have been decided early on. Examinee Kim Hyun-ho would have used his gun and his spirit to threaten Park Go-chan’s life so that he would no longer continue to be a bother. And then perhaps the situation where he had to be killed wouldn’t have arisen.”

“...”

“Well then. Anything else you curious about? If not, I’ll send you all home.”

“Hold on!”

It was Hye-su that raised her hand and spoke up.

“What is it? You’re such a bother.”

“Um...a bother...”

Hye-su’s face showed a hurt expression.

“I’ll be quick about it. You’re wondering why you got 200 karma when there was nothing you did. That’s because one of the ways of evaluation is by seeing how much of your given abilities was used. Examinee Lee Hye-su had not even a rat’s ass worth of capability but all else considered, you worked really hard. You good?”

“Oh...”

Then even counting the -50, she will have 150 karma left. Thank goodness. Working hard definitely pays off.

Her good fortune as like my own good fortune and I was happy.

“Ok. Then go on home.”

The baby angel was like a delinquent part time employee shooping us out of a store as he created the exam door.

As everyone starts to head out, I quickly shout

“Hold on! Hold on!”

The three people halt and look back at me.

“Before you go, give me your contact information. Actually, I’ll just give you my cell phone number so please memorize it and contact me. During our rest period, we should meet up and consult

about our next exam.”

“Oh right.”

“I hadn’t thought of that.”

Joon-ho and Hye-su agree.

“Aww I thought you had all forgotten and I was laughing inside. What a pity.”

That bastard.

I look at the baby angel and grind my teeth.

After the three people memorized my number, we returned to the world of reality.

“Son...”

I opened my eyes and an ajumma that looks like she would be really good at frying chicken looks at me desperately.

“What mom?”

“Its 11 am and you’re still sleeping?”

“...originally, smart people have to sleep a lot.”

“What about Napoleon?”

“That guy? He had the height of a loser. I’m an Einstein type. I need to sleep 10 hours a day.”

“Son. I know I said I’d let you rest for this month, but you really reek of unemployment. Just try living a little harder, ok?”

“Ok mom. Speaking of which, so I can be rising star of the fried chicken business, I’ve been exercising every day.”

“Alright. You always had a way with words. I’m going to drop by the bank and then go to the store.”

“Ok. Come back safely.”

Mom left the house and then it was empty. I go to the kitchen and go to the fridge and there is water and all kinds of food and ramen stacked in the pantry. There are eggs and plenty of kimchi and beer in the kimchi fridge.

“I’ve really come back.”

To think it is so easy to get food and something to drink.”

I am moved and have never thought of this before.

“Oh mom. Thank you for feeding and raising me. Turns out eating and living is extremely difficult.”

I pop an egg in my ramen and even put some rice in it and finish in a pinch.

I eat my fill and even drink a can of beer when my phone vibrates. I check it and I’ve gotten a text message.

[Is this Hyun-ho oppa? This is Hye-su ^^]

Hye-su has immediately contacted me. How could even the smiling face be so adorable.

[You’re up? I just had rice in my ramen and I’m being moved by a can of beer lol]

[Haha sounds yummy! [Bi-bim-bap](#) for me! With tons of red pepper paste]

(TN: Bi-bim-bap is served as a bowl of warm white rice topped with namul (sautéed and seasoned vegetables) and gochujang (chili pepper paste), soy sauce, or doenjang, a fermented soybean paste. A raw or fried egg and sliced meat (usually beef) are common

additions. The hot dish is stirred together thoroughly just before eating.)

[Eat it deliciously ^^ Oh, and don't use your karma, just leave it for now. We can all consult later and make a plan]

[Okay ^^ If you get Jun-ho's number please let me know]

[Ok]

I save Hye-su's contact number. After saving it into contacts as 'Hye-su <3' I save her as speed dial 1. Who cares? No one is going to look at my phone.

I finish my meal and open my ancient laptop and get online.

There are things I must do to prepare for the next exam.

'Oh, I almost forgot. How long is the rest period?'

I retrieve my board.

-Name: Kim Hyun-ho

-Class: 5

-Karma: +900

-Mission: Rest until the next exam.

-Time limit: 15 days

-You may receive a karma prize. To receive the karma prize, after retrieving the board, say 'karma prize'.

Half a lunar cycle.

The rest period has gotten longer since last time.

At the thought of there still being plenty of time left, my heart feels stronger.

'I have to use this time wisely. I'll just finish this and go hike.'

I have decided to hike and do pushups every day.

Even at the second exam, the exercise I did for the ten days prior was a lot of help. Thanks to the hikes, I was able to adjust to the mountain terrain, and I was able to withstand the difficulty my body endured.

I'm online and I begin to write on all kinds of community sites.

Chapter 25 - Proposition (Part 1)

[Title: Dreamt a strange dream.

Content: Last night I had a strange dream.

It was a white and empty world, void of anything. A revolting looking baby angel appeared, flapping like a sparrow. He spoke of nonsense commandments and exams.

Anyway, I asked him for the lotto numbers and he actually game them to me! This week I will scratch my lotto tickets. If I get first place, I will confirm. (Honest) I hope you all have good dreams too haha]

Yes, this should suffice.

A white world, an angel, commandments, exam. All the important keywords are in there.

I might be ignored if I write it too sincerely so I purposely put in the stuff about the lotto, but a fellow examinee will recognize it and contact me through email.

After copy-pasting this message onto multiple places, I put on my sweats and leave the house to go hiking.

On my way up the Mount Taejo hiking trail, I am contacted from

Joon-ho.

-This is Hyun-ho hyung's cell phone, correct?

“Indeed. You too have awoken.”

-Yeah, hyung. Did you get Hye-su noona's contact info?

“Yep.”

-What're you doing right now?

“I ate and now I'm hiking.”

-Hike?

“Exercise should be consistent.”

-Really? After getting the entry level 2 physical buffer, I haven't bothered with exercising or anything at all.

Hm? After hearing it, that makes sense. If you use a bit of karma to get the physical buffer and gain an impressive physique, it negates the prize of earning it through hard work.

“Now that I hear it like that, that makes sense. Anyway, it's something I've been doing every day so I'm going to continue. Oh

by the way, have you used the karma you received?

-No, I haven't used it yet.

“Then don't use it and leave it for now. Let's meet up and consult with each other and then carefully decide.”

-Will do. When should we meet up?

“I'm not sure. I'll give you a call about it later.”

-Okay, hyung.

I finish the call and save Joon-ho's number. In the address book, I make and put him in the 'Arena' group and move Hye-su's number over to this group too.

It seems in the meantime my physique has improved quite a bit. Reaching the peak of Mount Taejo and coming down isn't as difficult as it used to be. I was able to directly finish the hike without taking a break once.

‘Then again, compared to fighting those anthropoid beasts, this is a piece of cake.

It's after I return home and finish a shower.

Wing, wing (zing, zing).

The smartphone vibrates. I check the number and it's a restricted caller ID.

‘Who could this be?’

I decide to pick it up.

“Hello?”

-It's me.

If you say me, who am I supposed to know who you are?

... is what I want to say but I was clearly able to make out who it is by the voice.

“Kang Chun-seong?”

-Yes.

“Oh, it's a good thing you called. I made contact with the others. If you could give me your contact info...”

-Right now I do not have a contact number. In the future, I will reach out to you if need be.

“Oh, okay?”

I wonder what happened?

-It would be good to meet in person. Where is your house?

“It is in Cheonan. You can come to the Cheonan train station or the Cheonan express bus terminal.

-I will depart now. I will contact you when I arrive.

“What? Hold, hold on...!”

-Click.

The call ends.

I am extremely flustered but I decide to hold it in for now. But still at least he contacted me to meet up first. It seems after receiving the harsh judgement from the baby angel, he is in his own way, repentant.

I do some push-ups and read the comments on my internet posts and pass the time.

This time again, a restricted number gives me a call.

“Yes, Kang Chun-seong, where are you?”

-Cheonan station, eastern square.

“Okay, I will be there soon.”

I change my clothes and head out.

I loiter around at the entrance of the eastern square at Cheonan station when someone taps me from behind on my shoulder. I turn around and its Kang Chun-seong.

“Let’s go.”

“Yes, did you eat?”

“Not yet.”

“Me neither. There is a restaurant nearby where we could eat while we...”

“We can get the food to go. I want to talk where no one else is around.”

“Oh, okay, then let’s do that.”

Kang Chun-seong says he does not care what kind of food. So we buy a pizza and a cola. Kang Chun-seong must have had a place in mind because he takes the lead and goes to a nearby shopping building. I follow him up the stairs and we arrive at the rooftop.

Obviously there is no one on the rooftop.

“I have no other option as I am being chased. I apologize for inconveniencing you.”

“When you say chased, are you possibly talking of the police?”

“The police and the Incheon gang.”

I had surmised as much but it seems to be a complicated situation indeed.

We take a slice of pizza each and begin to eat.

As we eat, Kang Chun-seong speaks.

“I caused adverse circumstances in the last exam.”

“No worries, it was nothing.”

“I apologize; I was a distraction to the exam.”

“No, that isn’t true. Do not pay heed to what that angel bastard said.”

“No, it was an accurate judgment. I made the group uncomfortable. I am sure I would have been able to control a guy like Park Go-chan with a few threatening words.”

“But it is because you took the lead and headed up the fights that we all made it out alive. And that’s why you got 400 karma. You made a contribution which is why you received the prize, if you were nothing but a distraction, you probably would not have received anything at all.”

“Perhaps.”

Kang Chun-seong smiles a bitter smile.

“Since you are our leader, it seems you must listen to my situation.”

“No, what do you mean I’m the leader...”

“Not only the angel, but I too took notice of your decision making. To be able to pass all the exams, you must lead us. I thank you in advance.”

“Well, okay, I thank you too.”

Without another option, I took up the role of leader. Since I was the one who practically led the group anyway.

“I am a person that was trained in the martial arts way from Shanghai.”

And so began Kang Chun-seong's story.

Kang Chun-seong's life began its twists and turns when he rescued a humiliated friend.

When the friend took out a loan and was being threatened with his life from the thugs, Kang Chun-seong had no choice but to intervene in order to save his friend.

Using a broker, while he was in the process of smuggling his friend in to Korea, he got into a fight with the gang and sent 15 of them to the hospital.

Eventually, he became a target for the gang as well and had no choice but to escape to Korea with his friend.

The troubles continued to ensue.

His friend and him became contracted workers for a factory in Incheon but because of their illegal immigrant status, they were

unable to get due compensation.

After beating the factory boss, the friend and Kang Chun-seong were looking for a way to survive when they became participants in an Incheon gang.

The friend just became a gang member, but Kang Chun-seong's impressive skills made him a guard to the gang boss and he received special treatment for it.

“Then how did it come to pass that you are being chased by this gang now?”

At my question, Kang Chun-seong bitterly speaks.

“It turns out the Shanghai gang with which I had my quarrels had spread their hand to Incheon, using Chinatown as their center. The Incheon gang made some kind of deal with the bastards and as a show of friendship, they offered up my friend and me.”

“Oh...”

“And so my friend and I lost our lives, and I was given the opportunity to live again as an examinee.”

“And what happened to your friend?”

“He picked the road to the beyond. I heard so from the angel. He

was too tired to continue living.”

“... and what happened after?”

“First, I turned the Incheon boss that had turned us over into a [hemiplegic](#). I disabled about 15 of the members too so either the gang is bust or they are chasing me out of revenge, one of the two.”

(TN: Half paralyzed.)

It’s a chilly story.

Having mastered the aura control, Kang Chun-seong’s revenge would have gone on without a hitch.

“Thanks to that, I’m now being chased by the police but I don’t care. I have become even stronger with the 400 karma I received this time.”

“Oh, you used your 400 karma already?”

“I did.”

Crap.

It would have been better to use it after consulting as a group.

“Can you not tell me where you used it?”

“I must tell you. I used all 400 karma and got the medium level 1 physical strength buff.”

For a moment, I was doubting my hearing.

“Medium? Not entry level?”

“It turns out after entry level 5 is medium level 1. I had an entry level 5 body to begin with.”

Already at aura control entry level 4 and physical strength buff medium level 1! I get shivers at Kang Chun-seong’s awesomeness. Just how strong is this guy?

“So how much is a medium level?”

“Starting at the medium level, it seems to surpass human limitations. I am able to use strength and stamina that is not possible for humans.”

Kang Chun-seong looked down from the edge of the 5th story rooftop.

“If I jump down from here easily would that be explanation enough?”

“That’s truly amazing.”

“Because of the things I experienced, I tried all the more to stay apart from others, but it was the wrong way to think. From now on, I will cooperate with you all the way. I have become stronger since, so I will be of more help in the upcoming exam.”

“Yes, thank you and I look forward to it. But do you not have a place to stay right now? It’s getting cold too.”

“After the medium level 1 physical strength buff, I am immune to cold. It is not a problem.”

“But even so, I am sure you need to eat. For now, at least take this.”

I take out \$40 from my wallet. Surprisingly, Kang Chun-seong passively takes the money.

“I thank you.”

“Don’t mention it. I’ll keep getting help in the exams anyway.”

“Indeed. Anyway for now I am planning on staying in Cheonan and I will give you a call every day around lunch time.”

“Yes, please do. If there is anything you need, give me a call...”

But then at this moment, my smartphone begins to ring. It’s a

number I don't know.

“Who is this? Sorry, I'm going to take this.”

“Do.”

I say excuse me and pick up the phone.

“Hello?”

-is this Kim Hyun-ho?

It is a business like voice of a woman.

“It is.”

-I am contacting you after reading what you posted.

At those words I get the feeling of my heart just sinking to the floor.

The words I posted? That means she is contacting me after seeing the words I posted online. But how did you get my cell phone number?

“Who is this? And how did you get this number?”

-I'm sorry for calling you out of the blue. I am a researcher at the Korean Arena Research Center by the name of Cha Ji-hye.

“The Korean Arena Research Center?”

At my words, Kang Chun-seong's expression changes.

“It is a government institution?”

-Yes it is. With the support of the country we are aiding examinees like you, Kim Hyun-ho.

Lady Cha Ji-hye continues to talk to a very surprised me.

-You seem to me to be out in Cheonan station, would it be possible to come see us right away?

“How do you know I'm at Cheonan station!”

-We just got you location from this call.

“Who are you people!”

As I get angry, Cha Ji-hye replies.

-If you feel badly about it, I apologize. It was to move things along faster, there are no bad or other intentions to it. You probably don't have a lot of rest period until your next exam so would it not be better the faster things progress?

“...”

Not long after posting online they found my contact information and with a call got my location. It must be true that this woman is from a government institution.

-I am on the outer ring road heading to Cheonan. Would it be possible to meet up right away? I am, of course, on my way there alone.

I finish the call for now.

I ask Kang Chun-seong.

“What should I do? She said it's a government institution that recruits examinees and she's on her way over now.”

“What kind of person was it?”

“A young woman, and according to her, she's coming alone.”

“A national institution...”

Kang Chun-seong is deep in worry.

He finally speaks.

“Let’s meet her.”

“Should we do that?”

“It seems true she is government group and if they already know your personal details, it is unavoidable.”

“That is true.”

“First, meet her on your own. I will watch from nearby and if anything suspicious happens, I will act accordingly.”

“Okay.”

With Kang Chun-seong as my bodyguard, my heart feels strong like none other.

I call lady Cha Ji-hye again.

-Have you decided?

“Yes, I will meet you. But, I will request one condition. Are you going to do anything bad? Say, kidnap me or...”

-There won't be anything like that for sure.

“Can I trust you?”

-Think about it sensibly.

Cha Ji-hye lets out a quiet sigh and speaks.

-Would I be able to behave harshly against a strong examinee?

Ah, true.

Chapter 26 - Proposition (Part 2)

Kang Chun-seong's strength need not be mentioned and I too, if I put my mind to it, am capable of using Sylph and causing a major accident.

If she has any brains at all, the research center won't behave maliciously towards examinees such as us.

-We found your identity and called you out of the blue so I understand your apprehension. Please, be rest assured that whatever we talk about will not be unfavorable to you.

"I understand. Then we shall meet at Cheonan station."

After hanging up, we go into a nearby coffee shop, one at a time.

Kang Chun-seong seats himself next to the window and watches out of it.

I sit down at a nearby table, drinking an iced Americano, waiting for Cha Ji-hye.

I wonder how much time passed this way.

[I am at Cheonan station.]

A text arrives from Cha Ji-hye. I use a map app to send her our

location.

Soon after, a young woman in black formal clothes appears at the café.

‘Wow.’

Unbeknownst to me, I am amazed.

She is a beautiful woman for whom a short haircut and black formal clothes are surprisingly appealing on. Her long and firm legs are wrapped in white pants and reminds me of a deer.

As soon as she enters the café, she purposefully walks over to me immediately. It is a strong walk, unlike a woman. Step, step, her red ankle boots hit the floor with discipline.

“Nice to meet you, Mr. Kim Hyun-ho.”

“Yes.”

Cha Ji-hye sits directly across from me.

I stare at her and ask.

“Are you a soldier?”

“How did you know?”

Cha Ji-hye’s eyes go big and round.

Her expression is cold but her surprised face is actually pretty cute.

“You don’t waste words, your walk is strong, and your hair is short so it just reminded me of a soldier.”

At this she bites her lower lip and quietly mumbles.

“I still look like a soldier...”

“What?”

“Nothing. Anyway, I will go order and come back.”

She briskly walks over to the counter and puts in an order to the female employee.

“One caramel macchiato, one mint chocolate bagel, and one strawberry waffle set.”

For a moment I almost laugh.

She emanates the soldier pose but orders all these sweet things

and its cute. Is she trying to distract me by making me laugh?

I glance over at Kang Chun-seong. Kang Chun-seong gives me a slight nod. It means there are no others.

She finishes her order and returns to the table and starts talking right away.

“I will introduce myself first. I am Cha Ji-hye of the Korean Arena Research Center. I was in the army, bypassed national intelligence agency, and became a researcher at the Korean Arena Research Center.”

She’s not your average woman.

“When you say researcher, what kind of work do you do?”

“We research any and all information about the existential world, Arena, and its exams. For me, I am in charge of combat and survival., and I am looking to assume the role for caring for the examinees that will join. But...”

Cha Ji-hye glances over to the side as she talks.

“Is the person over by the window an examinee from the same team?”

“...!”

“I knew before I entered the café. You will have verified that I came alone, won’t he join us for our talk?”

“... I suppose.”

A sharp and discerning eye.

Eventually I call Kang Chun-seong over to our table.

Cha Ji-hye asks of Kang Chun-seong.

“What is your name?”

“I will not say.”

Kang Chun-seong bluntly refuses.

As he does so, Cha Ji-hye’s eyes glow fiercely.

“Your intonation means you’re Chinese.”

“... ”

“Apart from a height of 185 cm, your well-toned physique may be because of a physical strength buff skill, but I think you are

originally fit from having well acquainted yourself from specialty martial arts. And guessing from your extreme wariness, I think I will be able to find out your identity within the day by looking through a police database. Am I wrong?”

‘Geez!’

I am astonished. Wrong, my ass. She nearly got it all.

Kang Chun-seong exposes his teeth threateningly.

“You must not have thought that I can shatter your neck.”

“Do you really think I came alone?”

“What?”

Even the great Kang Chun-seong makes a surprised face.

Then, Kang Chun-seong’s gaze becomes increasingly cold, and the two are locked in a death gaze.

But then.

“The caramel macchiato, mint chocolate bagel, and strawberry set are out.”

“Excuse me.”

Cha Ji-hye gets up suddenly and runs over.

In an instant, the stormy tension dissipates into nothing.

Perhaps it is due to the plentiful sweets, but Cha Ji-hye returns in a much lighter mood.

She begins cutting her waffles with a knife and talks.

“I did indeed come alone.”

“ ... ”

Kang Chun-seong’s face is blank. I am sure my face is akin to his.

She happily eats her waffles like a normal woman, but doesn’t blink an eye at Kang Chun-seong’s threats. She is originally a soldier and national intelligence, and Cha Ji-hye really isn’t average.

“I don’t like this kind of tension or wariness. We really want to help examinees survive.”

Hm, I cannot just take those words for granted.

Of course, it doesn't seem like she approached us with bad intentions. But I am sure they are not going to blindly offer us aid either.

At the end of my thought, I open my mouth.

“While I was waiting, I went online. All the posts I made have been erased.”

“Yes, basically to prevent social panic, we are keeping the exams and Arena a secret.”

“Is that all?”

“What do you mean?”

“It didn't even take half a day for you to find out who I am, erase all my postings, and come meet us ASAP. It seems too fast paced for a Korean government institution.”

“...”

“This is what I am thinking. There are other research centers like this, not just in Korea? I don't know the reasons why, but they too are trying to convince examinees to join them. I am guessing that there is some benefit to be gained through examinees, or is this all my own delusion?”

“Wow, you are incredible.”

Above Cha Ji-hye’s cold expression is a slight hint of amazement.

“All country research centers are working hard to scout examinees. That is why we are moving so fast. Mr. Kim Hyun-ho, are you by chance your team leader?”

“Yes.”

“Of course.”

She nods her head as she goes on talking.

“As you guessed, there is a benefit to be gained through examinees. That is why we give our utmost support for the survival of examinees, but we do gain a benefit that examinees bring us. There is, amongst our support, a monetary prize.”

“And what is the benefit?”

“It is called majeong.”

“Majeong?”

“All living and moving things from Arena are carried within your bodies. It is like an energy cohesion, and that energy can be used as

a very high efficiency energy source, revealed through research done in America.”

“And so competitively using examinees...”

“Yes.”

“What kind of support are you lending in aiding examinee survival?”

“For example, we have this.”

Cha Ji-hye lifts up her sleeve. And underneath it is a charcoal colored outfit that resembles a wet suit.

“It is a battle suit our research center invented. Without some incredible strength, knives won’t penetrate it, and it has incredible thermic capability, making it ideal for camping. Because you can enter exams with clothes, we have concentrated on performance clothes and shoes.”

“Ah...”

“Not only that, we are collecting and researching information about Arena. We have completed the entire map of Arena, and found out what flora, fauna, and monsters reside in each location.”

“It wasn’t just empty words when you said you support.”

“Of course. Our priority is the survival of examinees. And your friend?”

“I am Kang Chun-seong.”

“Mr. Kang Chun-seong, as long as you are short of being a brutal criminal, we can give you a new identity, with Korean citizenship. There are already a couple examinees living new lives this way.”

“Hm.”

It's a sweet deal and Kang Chun-seong seems swayed.

“With the majeong you earn from the exams, you can increase your monetary prize and on top of that, based on your various skills, you will receive a salary. How does that sound? Do we still appear a suspicious research center scheming something malicious?”

“No, that is not the case. I would have been suspicious if you told me you were helping like a charity business.”

“You can receive this same deal from other countries, but majeong is a precious energy reserve and working together with your country's research center will have other benefits. I sincerely wish you decide to join us.”

“It doesn’t sound like a bad thing. I will consult with my teammates and make a decision.”

“Please do. Excuse me, but what turn are you on?”

Turn?

She is probably asking which exam number.

I slyly smile and speak.

“That is a secret.”

Cha Ji-hye makes a small grin.

“You are indeed sensible. I hope you join us. If you accept, I will become the person in charge of your team.”

“I will think it through practically.”

We get up from our seats and shake hands. Then she sits back down in her chair.

“I wish to finish all the food I ordered first...”

“Oh, please do.”

Cha Ji-hye concentrates on eating her waffles and bagel.

The first one to get up is Kang Chun-seong.

“I will depart first. I will contact you in the evening.”

“Please do so.”

Kang Chun-seong leaves and the two of us, Cha Ji-hye and I, are left alone.

She tastily eats her mint chocolate bagel and Cha Ji-hye speaks.

“There are some things I gathered from watching you two, would you like to know what it is?”

“Sure.”

“Seeing as how you haven’t met other examinees, you are under exam 5. You two are still awkward with each other so you’re under exam 3. And Kang Chun-seong may be a criminal but his faith in you, Kim Hyun-ho, means he is not a bad person.”

‘Damn.’

I’m completely surprised.

She glances up at me and continues.

“Your physique is average but you are the leader, you must have well acquainted yourself with a magical main skill.”

“Well, let’s say that’s true.”

“Is it? You are definitely don’t have a combat skill but if not a magic skill, you are in possession of a more special skill.”

“Let’s stop there.”

“Ha, I understand.”

Then Cha Ji-hye lets out a smile.

Her expression is cold like my older sister, but she is a girl with a rarely seen and cute smile.

After completely finishing her strawberry waffle set, Cha Ji-hye gets up out of her seat.

“It does not matter if it is late at night, so please consult with your team and decide and contact me before this day is up.”

“Aren’t you in too much of a hurry?”

“You are just past the second exam, so your rest period is only 15 days. We must make a decision as soon as possible and then prepare for the next exam. Did you use all your karma yet?”

“No, I haven’t used it yet...”

I say it to that point and then catch myself. Cha Ji-hye lets out another small smile.

“You are definitely past the second turn.”

‘Beat again!’

I am starting to fear this woman.

“Anyway, it’s all good. If you consult with us before using the karma and earn prizes accordingly, it will be all the more beneficial for further exams.”

“Uh, I understand. I will contact you by the end of today.”

“If you agree, we will make the contract and it would be good to go right into exam preparations. Nevertheless, I await your good decision.”

We shake hands and leave the café and part ways.

Right after, I call Joon-ho and Hye-su and explain to them everything that happened today.

Both of them have an enthusiastic response.

“Wow, really hyung? I am of course going to say thank you! Supporting us so we can survive the exams and giving us money, there’s no reason to say no.”

That is Joon-ho’s response.

“What do you think, Hyun-ho oppa? If you agree, so do I.”

That is Hye-su’s response.

Kang Chun-seong contacts me in the evening and he too agrees. It seems it was most pleasing to him, the part about the Korean citizenship.

I send a text to Cha Ji-hye and a reply comes back immediately.

[Please give me the names and address of your team members. We will personally go escort you.]

Chapter 27 - The Korean Arena Research Center (Part 1)

11 A.M.

I get an abrupt phone call.

-Is this Mr. Kim Hyun-ho?

“Who is this?”

-I am a research employee.

At his words I am up to attention. It's the Korean Arena Research Center.

-I have arrived at Cheonan to escort Mr. Kim Hyun-ho and Kang Chun-seong.

“I have not heard from Kang Chun-seong yet so you will have to wait a while.”

-I will be waiting at a location close to your place so please call me when you receive word from him.

“Yes.”

She said she would send cars to the team members and she meant it. Not only that but they are early and waiting, they are really devoted.

The national employees researching Arena must really be pouring their heart and soul into scouting examinees.

‘If I had played and tugged with another country’s research center I could’ve received a better offer. Well, too bad since I didn’t have the luxury of time to do so. And I like staying in Korea over another country anyway.’

It’s interesting.

I didn’t know there were national institutions, but to realize they are scouting examinees in fierce competition like a pro soccer team.

3rd, 4th, 5th...

If I can continue surviving the exams and keep getting stronger, other state institutions will offer money and try to scout me as well.

Imagining lots of countries coming to me with bags of money, competing with each other, trying to win me over, just thinking about it makes me feel incredibly good.

Of course, it’s all relative only if I can survive.

Zing, zing.

My smartphone rings. Unknown caller ID. Its Kang Chun-seong.

“Hello?”

-I am at Cheonan station.

“Come towards my house. I’m at...”

I give Kang Chun-seong my home address.

After that I give a call to the research employee.

“He said he’ll be right over.”

“Understood. Then I will be waiting with the car up front.”

“Yes, I am heading out now.”

I change my clothes and go out and in front of the apartment entrance is parked an [Equus car](#). Oh, it’s a surprisingly nice car. But still, they are a state institution so they’re using a state car.

(TN: A Hyundai Equus, a Korean car that I’ve never heard of.)

A guy looking to be in about his late 30's gets out of the car and introduces himself.

“Are you Mr. Kim Hyun-ho?”

“Yes, nice to meet you.”

“Please get in.”

He personally opens the back door. I feel like a VIP. A moment later, Kang Chun-seong joins us and sits next to me.

“We will depart.”

**

The guy takes the car and goes to a nearby army base and lets us off at the army's helipad. Not long after, a helicopter arrives making a strange noise.

The man points to the helicopter.

“Please get in.”

Where in the hell are we going?

I get a suspicious feeling but get into the helicopter with Kang

Chun-seong. The helicopter takes off making a strange sound.

As this is my first time in a helicopter, I frantically check out the inside of the helicopter and gaze at the view below.

After all that, the place we arrive is a lonely and remote island off the west coast. It's a fairly large island and I can see two large 10-story buildings.

'An island, I wonder if it's because it's an institution that cannot be revealed?'

After getting off the helicopter, we are guided by an employee and make our way into the building.

"Oppa!"

"Hyun-ho hyung!"

We arrive at a room kind of like a waiting room and Hye-su and Joon-ho heartily welcome us.

"Did you guys arrive by helicopter too?"

"Yes."

"I was a bit freaked out. They said to just get on the helicopter so

I thought where in the world are they taking me.”

I can see it. It’s almost like getting kidnapped.

I was less scared because I at least came with Kang Chun-seong. If they tried something funny, he would’ve KO’ed them all. Haha.

It happens when the four of us are gathered in the waiting room talking about this and that.

“You have arrived.”

Cha Ji-hye appears.

Today she is wearing a dark gray suit with a white sweater and brown ankle boots. Her walk is like usual, step, step, fearlessly intentional.

“Nice to meet you, I am Cha Ji-hye. From now on I will be your team’s supervisor.”

“You mean, if we sign a contract?”

“Yes.”

At my words Cha Ji-hye lets out her special tiny smile.

“I am aware you have passed the second exam, how many days of the rest period are left?”

“14 days. Our exam finished yesterday.”

“You posted online as soon as your exam was over?”

“Yes.”

“You are indeed very prudent. It is a relief that you have more time remaining than I thought.”

Ah, seriously, why does my heart just fly away every time this woman gives me a compliment?

Maybe because I spent my youth as a person who never had a romantic relationship. Or is it just that a person like me is ever so weak towards beautiful women?

“I will give a brief explanation of the contract terms. Our Korean Arena Research Center firstly aids in all ways possible for your survival, regardless of individual skill or results.”

“You mean we get the same treatment as veteran examinees, without discrimination?”

I ask.

Cha Ji-hye nods her head.

“Yes. There are limits to the help we can give you anyway, and the result is ultimately based on your own competence.”

“That is true.”

“You have all only just yet passed the second exam and our hope is for all of you to safely pass and grow from the next exam. Thus, more so than gaining majeong, our plan is to focus on survival.”

“If we do bring back majeong, how much will we get?”

“The compensation for majeong is dependent on the majeong energy concentration level. This compensation is without discrimination from other examinees and is the same for all examinees. Any difference will be in annual salary only.”

“How much salary can we get?”

“The salary is not dependent on results and is an amount basically for livelihood guarantee, but to determine that amount we must know how strong each of you are.”

“You mean you want to verify our skill levels and equipment?”

“Yes.”

“So in the end, before we sign a contract, we have to reveal all our information. Isn’t this a contract that is too unfair to us? We were unable to contact other country research centers so we don’t know what an average salary for this kind of contract is at all.”

“In those regards we have nothing to say except to trust in us. If we are to continue having a good relationship with our examinees, we have to treat you properly. If we do not, we lose talented people to other countries.”

“Hmm...”

I have a feeling I can trust this woman. Ah, have I been ensnared by a beautiful woman?

After my thinking, I speak.

“For now, I will contract for a year.”

“You say 1 year?”

“Yes, one year for now and if we can build adequate trust then I will extend the contract.”

“Hmm, okay. The salary can always be recalculated based on your teams’ skills. We are receiving government aid as well so you will not be disappointed there.”

I look around at the others. Lee Hye-su, Lee Joon-ho, Kang Chun-seong, all three nod their heads.

I talk to Cha Ji-hye.

“Okay.”

Cha Ji-hye takes out pen and papers from her briefcase and distributes it to us.

“Please write down all your skills and items and karma. With that as our basis, we will determine your salaries.”

We begin writing down on our papers.

Spirit summon entry level 1, magic rifle gun, bandolier, 900 karma.

Cha Ji-hye looks at what I wrote and is surprised and asks me.

“Spirit summon?”

“Is something wrong?”

“No, that is not it. I just haven’t heard of an examinee with a spirit summons.”

“Is it that special?”

“Yes, any examinee with better skills gets known throughout the facility, but there has never been an examinee with a spirit summons as their main skill. The rarer the skill, the better your contract terms will be.”

“That’s a relief.”

“But, is that 900 karma you wrote mistaken writing?”

“No. 900 karma is correct.”

Cha Ji-hye’s face is overcome with surprise all the more.

“You mean to say you earned 900 karma in the second exam?”

“Yes, well the angel bastard said it was the best record ever, but is that true?”

“Yes, yes. It is difficult to even get that much in the fifth exam. You are incredible.”

Seeing her amazed face makes me feel good. To be treated as a mister capable, in my shoes, an experience I never had in my 29 years.

Without much more to write, Lee Joon-ho and Lee Hye-su turn in their papers. Cha Ji-hye reads them and doesn't really show a response, but is surprised again at Kang Chun-seong's.

“Mr. Kang Chun-seong, have you provided false information?”

“I did not.”

“For a 2nd turn examinee to have aura control entry level 4 and physical strength buff intermediate level 1 is, from a common sense approach, impossible...”

“So?”

Kang Chun-seong's expression becomes menacing.

I quickly intervene.

“He's originally a really skilled martial artist.”

“... understood. Anyway, I will return after evaluation. It will not take long so please wait a moment.”

Cha Ji-hye takes the papers she received from us into her briefcase and leaves us.

“Hyung, how much do you think we'll get?”

“I don’t care about the money. I’m satisfied with them just helping me survive.”

It’s a greedless hope befitting a girl from a rich family, Lee Hye-su.

“True. Let’s not get too greedy for now. Like they said, for now, our priority is survival. Seeing how properly they’re set up, they will be a big help.”

Cha Ji-hye knows more way more about the Arena than we do. She has the full map of the Arena so she must possess immense knowledge.

The evaluation is really fast.

Cha Ji-hye returns after not even 30 minutes and passes out four contracts to us.

“You may read it and then sign. To sum up, the contract is for one year, the salary for Kim Hyun-ho and Kang Chun-seong is \$60,000, for the other two people, \$30,000.

“60k?”

I’m completely surprised. It’s a salary much higher than I expected.

Cha Ji-hye speaks to a very surprised me.

“Mr. Kim Hyun-ho, you received a high salary due to advancing in your very rare skill, the spirit summons, and for being the team leader, and Kang Chun-seong was definitely evaluated at 60k for already having the strength of a 5th, 6th turn examinee.”

“Then is there a mandatory requirement we have to fulfill?”

“You must use your karma after consulting with your research team manager, and any majeong you get in the Arena must be sold to us, and abide by training times, there are no other requirements.”

“Sounds good.”

I read the contract and Cha Ji-hye’s words are not wrong.

After my lead, everyone signs.

And so we concluded on the contracts.

“I congratulate you on becoming assigned examinees with the Korean Arena Research Center. I am everyone’s research manager Cha Ji-hye. If anything comes up, you may come talk to me.”

“Thank you.”

“I look forward to it.”

We do a last formal farewell with Cha Ji-hye.

And so we start our full scale training for the exams.

The very first thing we do is an individual interview.

Cha Ji-hye calls us one by one and listens to our detailed accounts of our past exams. She asks for full and detailed descriptions of how we passed the first and second exams.

It is with the intent of determining our tendencies and fighting style.

As the leader, I go in first for the interview.

I reveal everything truthfully including Park Go-chan’s death.

I did not think I would need to hide it.

“I will sum up. Examinee Kim Hyun-ho, you eliminated an examinee that tried to rape a comrade and murdered the red ape leader. Is this correct?”

“Yes.”

She nods her head.

“Very good. Examinee Kim Hyun-ho, you are far more capable than I thought you were. On top of it, you have a teammate like Kang Chun-seong, so your team has a good chance of long term survival.”

“Thank you. But about Park Go-chan’s death...”

“Do not worry. There is no evidence for punishment for what happened in the Arena and you had a very clear and appropriate measures. There are many teams that had collapsed teamwork because of people like him.”

Only then did the burden on my soul of Park Go-chan’s death get lifted.

Chapter 28 - Korean Arena Research Center

(Part 2)

(TN: So I did some research (Wikipedia) and found that the average disposable income of Korea in 2014 was \$30,000. So his salary of \$60,000 is actually pretty good. Keep in mind that stuff in Korea is pretty cheap as well.)

After the individual interviews followed a physical stress test. Cha Ji-hye suggested to each of us an appropriate karma prize.

“Thankfully, Kim Hyun-ho, your physical condition is that of a healthy adult male level.”

“That’s, that’s a relief.”

I had no confidence in my crap physique, so I let out a sigh of relief. It seems hiking every day made a difference.

“Mr. Kim Hyun-ho, I advise you spend 600 karma to get the entry level 4 physical strength buff. Physical health is of utmost importance so please refer to it.”

She shows me a paper.

-Physical strength buff (secondary skill)

-Entry level 1: will earn physique of a healthy adult male.
(-100)

-Entry level 2: will earn physique of an athletic adult male.
(-150)

-Entry level 3: will earn physique of a trained soldier. (-200)

-Entry level 4: will earn physique of specially trained marine.
(-250)

-Entry level 5: will earn physique that reinforces/strengthens
to the limits of the human body. (-300)

It is as Kang Chun-seong said, getting to the intermediate levels surpasses human limitations.

“Entry level 4 will give me the physique of a specially trained marine?”

“Indeed.”

“Without any difficult training, just for free?!”

“It is free. There is of course, a need to acclimate yourself to your suddenly increased physique.”

I summon my board and pick my karma prize and select the physical strength buff.

-Physical strength buff (secondary skill): strengthens physique.

*Entry level 2: will earn the physique of an athletic adult male. (-150)

“I select physical strength buff to entry level 4.”

As I say so, the words on the board change.

-Physical strength buff to entry level 4 will use 600 karma.
Will you select?

-Remaining karma: +900

“Select.”

Padt!

A light appears from the board and that light penetrates my body. I can feel my entire body squirming and I can feel it

changing.

“Huh?!”

“There is no need to be alarmed. Your body is changing with the skill.”

Like molding clay, my body was changing, squirming on its own.

My soft belly disappears and my arms and legs get firm. In place of the disappeared belly fat, something hard starts to take shape.

About a minute passes.

The change is complete.

“Wow!”

I see my own body and am completely surprised. Were my pecs this great?

I pull up my sleeve and the muscles in my arm are developed in minute detail. I lift up my shirt and check my middle.

“This, this is!”

That legendary six pack! Not only the withered arms and legs,

but the unappealing and dangling lower belly fat I had was nowhere to be seen.

Not only that.

Shoulders! Legs too!

Not just healthy muscle, but I now had muscles so fine they looked chiseled into me.

“Are you done?”

I was so excited looking at my body and I ask Cha Ji-hye a question. I come to my senses and scratch my head.

“This really is an amazing skill.”

“Not only physical strength, but your muscle endurance and stamina will have greatly improved.”

“I really like this. So, how should I spend the rest of my karma?”

“There is a secondary skill you must learn with 100 karma.”

“What is it?”

“It’s a skill called a guider. You can check it on your board.”

I verify the skill called guider on my board.

-Guider (secondary skill): gain a 6th sense to find your destination and location.

*Entry level 1: vaguely find the direction. (-100)

Was there a skill like this?

“It’s a skill that at least one person per team needs to know. Mr. Kim Hyun-ho, you are the leader and you can scout with Sylph so together with this skill, you can make good use of it together.”

“Understood.”

I consent and select this skill too. And so 100 karma was used and I was left with 200 karma.

“So I’ve got my secondary skill, but do I not need to raise my spirit summon skill?”

“Even if you raise your main skill one or two levels, it doesn’t make that much difference compared to level one. For right now, raising your secondary skills will make the most difference. Most of all, a strong physical and a strong sense of direction is the most

important.”

“Understood.”

I decide to trust Cha Ji-hye, who is a specialist.

“How should I use my 200 remaining karma?”

“That, we need to experiment with another specialist and we need a bit more time.”

“Experiment?”

“We are looking for the best choice, so trust us and wait.”

“Alright, I will.”

“Also, take this book.”

Cha Ji-hye hands me a very thick book.

“It is a comprehensive informational book on the Arena. Please read all of it.”

“Ok. And when does the training begin?”

“At this time, you don’t require any training.”

“Huh?”

There is no training needed?

Cha Ji-hye speaks to a doubtful me.

“Mr. Kim Hyun-ho, you do not have a part that requires improvement with short training immediately. You were able to survive on your own and your aim is 100 out of 100 without even looking at the target and you’ve mastered the uses of your spirit summon very well.”

“ ... ”

“Of course, if we come up with another idea on how you can use your spirit summon, we will suggest it to you right away. But for now, resting for the 14 days is best.”

“Is that the same for the other team members?”

“Mr. Kang Chun-seong does not have a need for training either. His combat fighting was actually to the point that our martial arts team needed to learn from him.”

“Well yeah...”

That man was originally strong like a monster and with his martial arts skill, isn't he complete already?

“But Lee Joon-ho and Lee Hye-su will stay here and receive training for the 14 days.”

“Here?”

“Yes. The two people have major deficiency in their skills and require special training. Of course for the 1-2 days before the exam, we give them time to rest and recuperate.”

I worry for Hye-su. She only has one sword and 150 karma. How much stronger can she get with special training?

“So can Kang Chun-seong and I just go home?”

“Mr. Kang Chun-seong does not have a place to go so he has decided to stay here. We can escort you with a helicopter and vehicle to your place

I took the helicopter and rode the Eqqus and by the time I got home, it was 7 pm. I returned and took a shower and again, was overcome with awe and happiness when checking out my own body. If Hyun-ji sees, she'll be so surprised. She always teased me saying she doesn't like to see [anchovies](#). I shall astonish her with this oppa's [chocolate](#) abs. ...actually that seems kind of perverted

so I won't. What kind of bizarre thing would that be to do to a younger sister?

(TN: because anchovies are skinny and weak like he used to be.)

(TN: as in his abs look like the squares on a bar of chocolate)

After finish my shower, I still find my abs to be so lovable that I go around my house without a shirt on. I giggle and smile in front of the full body mirror and put on just jeans and assume some model poses. Ahh I am happy.

‘I should test out how much better this is.’

First, I lightly do some pushups.

‘A thousand. I think I can do a thousand!’

I am no longer panting for air after 50. I get in a handstand position and try to do a pushup. Even this works! Is that all? I succeed in doing pushups with just both thumbs.

“Sylph. Aren't I cool?”

-Meow!

This cute thing just nods her head and is full of aegyo.

Indeed, even the spirit has eyes to see.

Yes, of course. I am sure she didn't just agree simply because I am her owner. I am greatly satisfied. My body was firm.

‘Marines with special training gained this body through training alone? They’re really respectable.’

I almost feel like a thief for having gotten this body for free. It was while I was exercising, not realized time passing by.

Beep beep beep-

With a sound of the password being put in, the front door opens.

“Son. I’m home!”

‘Oh, its mom.’

I quickly put on a top.

“Did you sell a lot of fried chicken?”

“No...”

“[Huh? Are you slowing starting to fail?](#)”

(TN: The word he uses means to fail, as in a business failing, not fail as in a person failing)

“Business hours aren’t even over, but we ran out of ingredients. I’m so upset.”

“...still on fire. It comforts me as your heir.”

“Haha son, you should hurry and come out to work at the store soon.”

“Starting next month.”

Now that I think of it, I am no longer unemployed. I am now a high earner earning 60k as an annual salary. But how to explain this?

‘My mom will be so upset if I tell her I can’t work at the store because I’ve gotten employed.’

Mom was so excited, looking forward to spending time with her son at the store.

She’ll be sad again if I disappear again with a job.

‘I’ll keep it a secret for now.’

I decide to solve this problem after the 3rd exam. A moment later, noona gets home. She must have dropped off mom and then gone to park the car.

As soon as she gets into the house, with a sharp eye, she looks around the house.

“Where’s Hyun-ji?”

“Not here.”

Now that I look, it is 10 pm and Hyun-ji hasn’t come home.

“She hasn’t answered her phone either.”

No way?

“Is she at the club again?”

Mom asks a straightforward question.

As she asked, noona’s gaze become a level colder.

“A TOEIC 400-er is at the club at this house?”

A [TOEIC](#) score of 400? I almost puke up blood.

That’s the specs on a college student about to graduate?

(TN: From Wikipedia: The Test of English for International

Communication (TOEIC) is “an English language test designed specifically to measure the everyday English skills of people working in an international environment.” Basically, a test you take that employers will check. This is out of 990 in Korea.)

The 33 year old spinster lawyer rages with fire and looks at me.

“Kim Hyun-ho!”

“Wh-wha-why?”

I feel as if her icy gaze is shattering through my heart.

“Go out and find her right now.”

“Where am I supposed to find her?”

“Find her, unemployed.”

“Yes ma’am.”

Like a reflex, formal speech that I don’t even use with my mom just comes out of my mouth. I quickly put on a jacket and run out of the house.

I leave the apartment in the dead of night and I feel at a loss for what to do. Hyun-ji is definitely playing like crazy right now, I’m

sure.

‘She has her phone off, that means she’s either at a club or a night club. It’s a weekday and going out to play after school means she hasn’t gone to Gangnam or Hongdae.’

There is only [one club in Cheonan, but lots of night clubs](#).

(TN: A night club is somewhere you go and you get checked into a booth by an attendant and it usually has alcohol. A club is one where you walk in and get your own stuff/spot. There is more music and dancing and it has less alcohol.)

How am I to know which one Hyun-ji is at...

‘Huh?’

Suddenly I get a weird feeling. I sense that if I go to the right, for some reason, I will be able to find Hyun-ji.

I come to think of the secondary skill, guider, that I got today.

‘Yeah. With this skill, I’ll be able to find her!’

It is just a vague direction only, but with this skill and a map app, I think it’ll be possible.

I take out my smart phone, open the map app, and look up clubs and night clubs in Cheonan. In the direction of my 6th sense, there

is only one located. Thankfully, it is close to here.

‘Ok. Just you wait Hyun-ji.’

I grab a taxi and head towards the club.

As I arrive at the club, I can sense that Hyun-ji is inside.

‘This is it’

I get out of the taxi and head for the club.

I had just thrown on my clothes, but because it’s a weekday, without much ado, I am able to get into the club.

There is a loud electronic music attacking my eardrums. That DJ bastard must be a hearing impaired person.

There aren’t as many people dancing as I thought.

I scan the crowd and I can’t see Hyun-ji. Just full of fricking dudes.

‘Perhaps this way?’

The guider skill guides me to the left.

It's an area where rooms are clustered together. Maybe...but is she drinking with guys in one of these rooms?

‘This TOEIC 400 scorer!’

I briskly walk over in that direction.

I look around and I get a strong sense from one of the rooms.

‘This is it.’

I open the door and go inside.

The guy and girl's gaze from inside the room tilt over to me. Boys 3, girls 3. Among them, of course, is Hyun-ji.

“Oh. Op...oppa?”

Hyun-ji's two eyes become round like a rabbit.

“Let's go, you thing.”

“How did you know to come here?”

“Noona sent me here, that’s why I came.”

“Un...unni?”

Hyun-ji’s voice starts to shake in fear.

“Who’s this?”

“Must be Hyun-ji’s oppa.”

The girls start to whisper and the men, with blank expressions of their faces, gaze back and forth between me and Hyun-ji.

I sigh and gesture.

“Hurry up and let’s go. How could you think to come to a club with your TOEIC score?”

“Heeeeeee..”

“...”

Hyun-ji has a tearful face on and gets out of her seat. She grabs her bag and obediently comes out. She must find noona to be scary.

Chapter 29 - Girls (Part 1)

“I’ll go first.”

Hyun-ji grabs her bag and gets up from her seat.

“Hey. Where are you going? Stay and play some more.”

The guy that was sitting next to her with dyed blond hair suddenly grabs her wrist and pulls.

At that, Hyun-ji falls back into her seat, giggling and tries to get back up.

“No, I have to go now.”

“No. Don’t go.”

The guy is trying to be cute and joke but grabs Hyun-ji’s wrist tightly and won’t let go.

Hyun-ji had laughed with him, thinking it was a joke, but her face grows confused.

‘What is this now?’

I speak politely to the guy.

“I’m sorry for crashing the atmosphere, but we have no choice due to family circumstances right now.”

“Eyyyyy what circumstance? We were in the middle of having fun and it’s not like your little sister is a kid either.”

“We have a situation. I’ll be taking Hyun-ji and leaving now. Please let go of her hand.”

“I wish I could...”

The blonde guy lifts up the hand holding Hyun-ji’s hand up high.

“The hand won’t come apart, it’s strange.”

“Hahaha.”

“Ah you idiot.”

His friends think it’s funny and laugh.

Funny? This isn’t a joke.

“Please let go.”

Flustered Hyun-ji tries to shake his hand off but the man doesn't let go.

The atmosphere continues to grow chilly.

‘Ahh seriously...’

Park Go-chan was like this too and at this point, I grow curious. Do I look like the type that can be easily taken advantage of?

Why does everyone quarrel with me without a care in the world, assuming that I will be flustered and not know what to do?

“Why doesn't hyung-nim just drink and play with us? Huh?”

Then the blonde bastard lifts up a beer.

At that moment.

Kwok! (hitting sound)

“Kuk!”

Without restraint, I extend my hand and grab his neck.

“Will your hand let go now?”

“Kuuk! Kuuk!”

“You wanna sit me down next to my younger sister and play?
You wanna die?”

Alright. This bastard saw me correctly. I was not the kind of person that could use violence without hesitation. Up to a while ago, I really was like that.

But then I killed tens of hundreds of red apes and disposed of Park Go-chan’s body and the me of my past is gone.

‘Now do you realize that you are not the average person? That you are actually a very special kind of person?’

I don’t know, fuck.

That doesn’t sound like a compliment. I’m saying that this me, where I feel like I could smash his neck and kill him, I don’t like it.

“Oppa!”

“Hyun-ji. You go out.”

“O...ok.”

Now that her hand is free, Hyun-ji quickly heads outside.

“I’m gonna go too.”

“I’m gonna go with you.”

Hyun-ji’s two friends frantically grab their bags and get up.

“Let go of that hand!”

A friend of the blonde guy gets up and yells.

After Hyun-ji and her friends all leave, only then do I let go of the guy’s neck. He gags and tries to catch his breath, this blonde bastard.

His two friends stare at me with intimidating eyes.

I speak.

“I’m sorry about that, but your friends joke was a bit too much. I apologize again. Have a fun night.”

I bend at my waist and respectfully say goodbye and quickly get out of the room.

Well, I understand. They spent a lot of money to get a room and

were playing and I just barged in and ruined the good atmosphere. Who would like that? Not to mention, today's club is a sausage fest.

Just seeing the few girls that were in there, Hyun-ji and her friends were on the high end.

But still, he can't be beaming and smiling in front of a girl's real oppa.

Hyun-ji and her friends were waiting outside the room.

"Let's go."

"Ok..."

I take the downcast Hyun-ji and start to leave the club.

And then.

"Where are you going you shit?"

'Huh?'

I look behind me and that blonde bastard has jumped out and is huffing and puffing and glaring at me.

Aww I just want to brush him off as a jerk, but in his hand, he is holding an empty alcohol bottle.

“I said where are you going!”

The blonde guy with bottle in hand briskly walks towards me.

“Oo-oppa!”

“Oh my gosh!”

Hyun-ji and her friends are terrified. The gaze of the people around us start to focus in on us.

What if we end up going to the police station?

The blonde guy gets close. My right hand moves like a reflex. With the tip of my hand, I brush off the bottle that the guy is holding.

Pasak!

Surprising, the bottle is completely shattered except for the neck that the guy was holding on to.

“...?!!”

The blonde bastard freezes like ice.

‘Me. I’m surprised too!’

Momentarily, strength flooded my body and without even knowing, I had tried using it. I thought perhaps it was possible and I really did it!

‘It said the physique of a marine, and it was true!’

Things like this are possible too. I am admiring the strength of the physical strength buff entry level 4.

“Why? Got something else?”

At my question, the blonde bastard, with an idiotic expression, shakes his head back and forth. He’s finally caught on that I am not an opponent that he should fight.

Eventually, the fight was concluded and we left the club.

“Oppa, I’m sorry...”

Hyun-ji is totally about to cry. Even so, she’s holding on tightly to my sleeve and seeing this kind of behavior, she was born with aegyo.

Without the energy to get mad at her, I just sigh.

“It’s alright. Like the guy said, you’re not a kid either. Who you hang out with and play with, I don’t think it’s a place for me to interfere.”

“No oppa, please don’t misconstrue it. While playing here, I’ve never been in a situation like

that.”

At Hyun-ji protesting her accusation, her friends offer up their words.

“It’s true. The people we usually hang out with have good manners.”

“They were so insistent, we were just talking with them...”

I gesture with my hand.

“That’s fine. Anyway, why did you turn off your phone? We couldn’t contact you and were worried. You should’ve called saying you were late.”

“Hing (whining sound) If I say I’ll be out playing, unni doesn’t let me.”

“Why do you need noona’s permission? Not like you ever listened well anyway.”

“Lately, I’ve been getting my allowance from unni...”

“Huh?”

“Umma says she is now preparing for old age, so unni is going to be responsible for me now. The credit card that I carry is unni’s.”

“Ohhhh...”

I get the gist of it. The only person that can control our rein-less fowl, Hyun-ji, is noona. That’s why noona took the reins from umma and started personally overseeing it.

“Whew. You 400-er.”

“What is a 400-er?”

“It’s your TOEIC score you.”

Hyun-ji’s face becomes awfully distorted. Her friends began to giggle and laugh.

“Aww what? That’s so embarrassing!”

“You know what embarrassed is?”

“Oh yeah. Like what was your TOEIC score?”

“...650.”

“Oh my. So high! I respect you! What’s your secret? You must be an industrial spy!”

“Better than 400! The score is 400, are you going to yell at your human resources manager? Were you just going to meaninglessly talk at your interview?”

At Hyun-ji’s and my bickering, her friends were laughing like crazy. And so the awkward atmosphere that came about from the fight disappeared.

As the atmosphere changed, one of her friends, with the long straight hair and impressionable double eyelids, a cute girl, asked a question.

“Anyway, oppa, did you learn martial arts?”

“Oh right! I was so surprised too. Oppa, how did you break that alcohol bottle?”

Hyun-ji claps her hands and asks me.

I scratch my head.

“Not martial arts, just exercise you know? I’m exercising hard these days.”

“I saw you going for a hike every day, but now that I see you, your body has strangely become good?”

Hyun-ji taps my shoulders and my chest in an interested manner.

“A while ago, you weren’t like this. Does exercise usually show results this fast?”

“Well, it’s not like I had anything else to do. All day I just exercised. I was surprised I could break that bottle too. Must have just been coincidence.”

“You must have really exercised a lot. Oppa, show me the abs. Abs!”

Gasp. The girl with the long straight hair and double eyelids twinkles her eyes and asks me.

“Oh. Uh...I can’t. I don’t have abs and things like that.”

“Huh? Nuh-uh. You’ve got abs? since when?”

Hyun-ji is poking my belly.

I feel like a lamb surrounded by carnivore females. They're scary!

“Hee hee anyway, I see you in a different light now oppa. I had no idea you had a side like that. Turns out you're really brave.”

Hyun-ji wraps her arm in my and shows aegyo. I brush her hair.

“Child, even if you act cute like this, today is your end. Noona is waiting for you.”

You think I wouldn't know your intentions?

“Hiiiiingggg oppa don't be like that, keep it a secret. Can you just say I was with friends talking at a café? Huh?”

“Oh yeah, that will work real well while you're reeking of alcohol.”

“Min-jeong! Perfume!”

Hyun-ji snaps her fingers and the double eyelid girl, called Min-jeong, quickly takes out perfume from her bag and sprays.

The smell of jasmine strongly stimulates my nose.

Hyun-ji spins round and round in front of the perfume and spreads her arms in a ta-da.

“How is it? It doesn’t smell anymore, right?”

“The perfume smell is more suspicious.”

“Oh what?”

“You should just give up. Nothing will work with noona. So why did you have to go and turn off your phone?”

“I’m busy and kept getting calls. I thought I would get caught with the music so I was gonna say my battery died. Hing, I’m so dead.”

But then suddenly, the double eyelid girl shoves her face up to right up to mine and asks,

“Oppa, lets exchange phone numbers.”

“What?”

What out of the blue nonsense is this?

“Next time Hyun-ji turns off her phone and goes submarine, you can just call me. We always hang out together.”

“Oh should I? Then thanks.”

I hand over my smartphone to the double eyelid girl. She takes my smartphone and quickly begins to input her number. But then Hyun-ji, who has been seeing this all go down, starts to frown.

“Hey! You treacherous bitch. Stop”

“Why?”

“Who do you think you’re hitting on? Bad bad! Get away from my oppa. “

“Humph. What did I do?”

The double eyelid girl calls and then saves my number on her phone. Even with Hyun-ji’s threats, she’s very persistent.

I get my phone back and verify. And the friend’s name is ‘Yoo Min-jeong ^^*’ is how she input it. In the midst of all that, even with the emoticon, she has fast fingers.

Impressive persistence.

Wait. Have I been hit on?

A strange atmosphere has been made.

“Anyway, how are we gonna get home? All the taxis have stopped.”

Another friend asks again

“Oh right. We can walk home but what about you guys?”

Hyun-ji looks worried too.

Min-jeong sighed.

“We were originally gonna spend the whole night playing here and then take the first taxi back.”

“I’ll be on my way. You guys should just keep playing.”

At this, her friends strongly disapprove.

“Nah. I don’t even wanna to go clubs anymore.”

“What if we meet those guys again? We’ll just have to grab a taxi and go.”

I began to feel guilty. If it wasn’t for me, they’d all be having a fun time. But of course, I can’t stand to watch my younger sister get picked up by that asshole blonde bastard!

“It’s my fault so I’ll pick up the taxi fee.”

“Huh? Oh no.”

“It’s ok...”

But then I take out my wallet and open it up and begin a cold sweat. Where did it go?

My four \$10 bills.

‘Huk! Right! Kang Chun-seong!’

Only then did I remember that I had given all my cash to Kang Chun-seong. I’m flustered and frozen like a stone statue and Hyun-ji comes over slowly. She pokes me in the side with her elbow and quietly asks me

“Hey sir.”

“...”

“You didn’t by chance open your wallet and find that you have no money, you unemployed oppa?”

“...”

“Wow this is so embarrassing!”

Hyun-ji laughs hysterically.

Her friends cover their mouths and laugh along.

Amidst the carnivorous girls, bent over in laughter, I am so flustered that I can't raise my head. This isn't right. This isn't it! I could've finished off looking so much more cooler!

...in the end, her friends paid with their money to grab a taxi and go home.

I return home with the still laughing and teasing Hyun-ji.

But Hyun-ji had to pay her proper dues down on her knees in front of noona.

“Starting next month, I’m lowering the credit card limit to \$300.”

“Hinggg.”

“It is until you raise your TOEIC score to at least 800 at least.”

That is not something that is possible with Hyun-ji's head.

Chapter 30 - Girls (Part 2)

The next morning, I get up as soon as I open my eyes. My upper body bounces up like rubber and surprises even me.

‘Oh right. I am now a man with abs hahaha.’

I pet my well chiseled 6 pack and and giggle. I may become a narcissist this way. I pick up my phone to check the time and there is a message on it

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Oppa, are you up?]

Oh, it’s Hyun-ji’s friend Min-jeong.

I send a reply.

[Me: I just woke up.]

I wash my face and brush my teeth and come out to the hall. My phone vibrates again so I check it.

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Thanks to oppa, I got home safely last night.]

I like her prompt replies. Girls nowadays always purposefully reply late.

I send her an immediate response.

[Me: Don't mention it, it's not like I paid your taxi fee]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Hahaha you must've been embarrassed]

[Me: A completely empty wallet and three girls giggling, it'll remain a life-long trauma]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Hahaha I'm sorry. Anyway, as thanks for saving us last night, I'll buy you a meal]

[Me: You'll buy?]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Yes, yes]

[Me: Because you think I don't have money...]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: No haha then oppa can buy.]

[Me: I don't have any money]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Hahahahahahahahaha]

We spent a good while giggling and chatting when it happened.

‘Murder?!’

I get a wave of chilly air and turn around Hyun-ji is glaring at me.

“You uh, didn’t go to school?”

“Today is a holiday.”

“Yeah? Anyway, what’re you looking at?”

“Give it.”

“...what?”

“Give me your phone.”

“Let’s respect privacy amongst family members.”

“Were you respecting my privacy when you barged into the club and dragged me out?”

“That was because noona made me and I had no choice.”

“Oh whatever, hurry up and hand it over!”

Hyun-ji speedily snatches up my smartphone. She’s faster than a

red ape!

Hyun-ji sees the chatting history on my smartphone screen and starts to shake in boiling rage. Then...

“Mom! Oppa’s been tripped by an evil wench!”

She goes and tattles on me to mom, who is getting ready to leave for the store.

Stop!

At Hyun-ji’s words, mom turns her head.

“Wench? What do you mean?”

“She’s my friend, but oppa is completely fallen for her.”

She’s calling her own friend a wench. What kind of friendship is that?’

“Oh my.”

Mom’s face is overcome in anticipation and claps her hands.

“Evil wench or whatnot, are you saying there’s a girl for my son? Can I expect a grandchild then?”

“What peaceful nonsense is that! If a romance newbie guy like oppa gets caught by a girl like her she’ll just dangle him up and down and play with him and suck up his entire soul!”

Don’t call me a romance newbie! I am not a newbie! Even though I’m pretty close to it!

“No matter how much he’s dangled, I’ll be happy as long as I get a grandchild.”

My mom is definitely unusual.

“Wow, seriously mom!”

Hyun-ji kicks her feet in protest.

I use that moment to reclaim my smartphone from Hyun-ji’s hands.

And then I giggle again and restart the chat.

[Me: Hyun-ji is badmouthing. She says if it goes wrong I can even get my soul sucked up.]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Haha so funny. But oppa, do you know?]

[Me: What?]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: It's not entirely wrong.]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Going stir crazy cuz of missing me, treading carefully in case I'm mad, getting so happy when I do a small thing, if you date me, that's how it always goes.]

[Me: ;;;]

(TN: ;;; is a sweating emoticon...I think.)

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: How much must I be liked for that to happen?]

How much...

At those words I flinch like a daggers been driven through my heart.

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Would oppa like to be like that?]

‘Ku huk!’

A direct hit. A dead center fastball strike. Aside from being so taken aback, I cannot get a sense of how to reply at all.

And then.

[Notice: Mr./Ms. Hyun-ji has invited you to a chat room.]

[Notice: Mr./Ms. Hyun-ji has invited Mr./Ms. ‘Yoo Min-jeong^^*’ to the chat room.]

Hyun-ji has invited us to a group chat room.

[Hyun-ji: You, Min-jeong.]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: What^^?]

[Hyun-ji: I have a video of you when you were freaking out at the club from last time, shall we all watch, okay?]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Gasp;;]

[Hyun-ji: You weren’t messing around then were you?]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Sorry T_T]

[Hyun-ji: With a top off and pole dancing]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: I’m so sorry! ;;;]

[Hyun-ji: stop behaving frivolously]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: T_T]

I wonder what kind of video it is. Just how crazy were they partying?

In my head all kinds of thoughts run through, and then the chatting is done. I wonder if this short something with Yoo Min-jeong is over.

Zing.

A short buzz.

I check my smartphone.

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Oppa, you know you haven't replied yet? I'll be waiting. Shh, it's a secret from Hyun-ji!]

Woah, I can understand why Hyun-ji got all up in arms about it now.

I thought she might have surrendered at Hyun-ji's warning, but she just brushed it off and immediately sent me a text. I can sense the attitude of this unhesitatingly forward carnivorous girl.

After a long while I send a reply.

[Me: I want to see]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Me?]

[Me: pole dance]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Hahaha]

[Me: Hahaha]

Ah, this is fun. Things like this. Thanks to it I started my day off enjoyably.

I got a great body in one morning but I don't give in to laziness and go on a hike. I am of the mind that if my body is lazy, my mind will become lazy too, so I will exercise consistently.

‘There are people like Kang Chun-seong.’

A martial artist who trained his body to an entry level 5 degree through pure effort.

My body now is impressive, but how much work did Kang Chun-seong do over all his life?

A person like that acknowledged me as his leader. And so as the leader, in front of him, I have to at least not show a pathetic me.

‘It is not a strength I got through work, so I should work even harder.’

After my hike, my mood is lifted by quite a bit. Without any strain, I got to the peak and down. It felt like just a stroll.

‘But I should still work until it is hard.’

I think in order to get past a difficult situation, I have to work out hard and lengthen my endurance.

I don’t really know any exercises so I just spent the time doing push-ups.

I get a phone call from Cha Ji-hye.

-Hello, this is Cha Ji-hye.

“Yes, hi.”

-Are you getting used to your changed body?

“I’m going to try and find where the limit is. I finished a hike and now I’m exercising.”

-That is a good idea. Resting is good but please consistently exercise.

“I will. Why did you call?”

-We have concluded on how we should use your remaining 200 karma.

“Oh right, you said you needed to experiment last time?”

-Yes. We succeeded in the experiment. With exactly 200 karma is a rifle item.”

“Rifle? Item?”

-An itemized gun from our world has better performance and quality than the karma kind.

“I suppose so, the magic rifle I have only has a shot distance of 60 meters...”

-Would you like to come to the research center tomorrow and experiment with the rifles and make a decision?

“Yes, alright. Will I be picked up this time too?”

-Yes. We will escort you via car and helicopter. The research center is a secured facility so you cannot find it on your own.

“Okay. I will see you tomorrow.”

-Yes.

I finish the call.

A rifle...

The muzzle loading magic rifle I currently have only has a shooting range of 60 meters, and every shot, I have to load a bullet into the chamber.

But if it's a rifle from our world?

I have a 100% shot record through Sylph, and what if I am given a rifle with a shot range of 500 meters?

‘I could really be unstoppable.’

I can scout the surrounding 1 kilometer with Sylph and every time something comes within range, I'll shoot to kill!

Just thinking about it makes me feel stronger and gives me sense of security.

The next day, I arrive at the research center located on an isolated island off the western coast, via car and helicopter.

“Please come this way.”

As soon as I arrive, Cha Ji-hye guides me. How shall I say, she seems a bit excited. It seems she really wants to show me the results.

We take the elevator to the 5th floor basement.

The place we arrive, five stories underground, is a shooting range.

‘Expansive!’

It’s a basement space bigger than the average school field! Along the lined up targets are marked 50 meters, 100 meters, 250 meters.

“It’s very large.”

“It’s a gun range, expected to be used for training, so of course.”

She speaks matter-of-factly. This woman’s speech is short, as

usual. She may never shed her soldier demeanor.

“First, take a look at this gun.”

Cha Ji-hye goes into a closet marked ‘weapons’ and comes out with two rifles. Of the two, she hands me one.

It’s a very classic rifle, with its butt done in wood.

“It’s a rifle I’ve seen a lot in war movies.”

“Indeed. Made in 1891, it’s called a Mosin-Nagant, a rifle developed in the late 19th century.”

“Mosin-Nagant?”

I take a close look at the Mosin-Nagant she handed to me.

The length looks to be just a bit over 1.2 meters, and I cannot see the magazine. Its classic style of its design makes me feel like the protagonist to a war movie.

But this heavy weight. It can be an impressive blunt weapon on its own.

“And the magazine?”

“There is a five round magazine in the gun, and it fires with bolt action.”

I’ve seen arms before and can tell by look at this.

With a bolt action, every time you shoot, the bolt gets pulled and an empty shell is removed.

“It’s better than a muzzle loading gun but do you have any semiautomatics? I think this will be difficult close range.”

“We have no choice. Among the existing rifles, this one uses the least karma.”

“Then I have no choice. So you’re saying this one is 200 karma?”

“No, it is 300 karma.”

“What? Then why did you show this to me?”

“We experimented taking the 300 karma Mosin-Nagant and changing its worth into a 200 karma or lower.”

“Is something like that possible?”

“Of course. We succeeded in our experiment, and this is the 200 karma Mosin-Nagant.”

Cha Ji-hye shows me the other rifle that she was holding.

It's the same [Mosin-Nagant](#).

‘It doesn’t like particularly any different.’

I put the butt of the rifle against my shoulder and get into shooting position. And then I am towards the target area from the 250-meter line...

‘Huh?’

I then realize that something is different.

“It cannot aim.”

“That is true, since we got rid of the front sight and back sight.”

Indeed.

There is no front sight and back sight. There is no way to properly shoot without these things. In normal circumstances.

“A rifle that cannot properly shoot loses a lot of its worth. Not that you, Kim Hyun-ho, need to aim.”

“Oh! There was this possibility!”

I realize it now.

They don't just call themselves a research center.

To think of an idea like this, I can tell they are really working for survival of the examinees.

“With that Mosin-Nagant, you can itemize it for 200 karma. Would you like to test its rifle performance?”

“Sure.”

She hands me a clip with 5 bullets in it.

I take it and then don't know what to do and shrug my shoulders.

“Teach me. I have no clue.”

“It's understandable since it was developed over 100 years ago.”

I load the bullets and assume position as she teaches me.

“Sylph.”

-Meow!

Sylph appears in a swish and gently sits down on my shoulder.

Cha Ji-hye sees the spirit for the first time and with an interested expression, is at a loss for words.

Chapter 31 - What Do You Want Me To Do (Part 1)

“So cute.”

“What?”

“It’s nothing.”

It looks like Cha Ji-hye is flustered.

“Didn’t you just say something?”

“I didn’t say anything.”

With a business like tone, she cuts it off.

“... Well, alright.”

She definitely said something.

I reassume target position.

My shoulder, with the butt of the rifle pushed against it, is a little uncomfortable. It’s an unfamiliar gun and it feels awkward. I’m sure it’ll get more comfortable as I use it.

I take tentative aim from the 250-meter mark.

Sylph is sitting on my shoulder and she extends her front paw and ever so slightly adjusts the rifle.

-Meow.

It almost sounds like she's telling me to shoot. Okay. I pull the trigger.

Tang-!!

A loud and piercing gunshot! The heavy recoil hits my shoulder hard.

'That was surprising.'

If I didn't have the physical buffer entry level 4, my posture might have been shaken from the recoil. It's an incredible recoil. The target is hit and faints over backwards.

"How is it?"

"I was surprised cause the recoil was harder than I thought it would be."

“It uses a 7.62 mm bullet. It is definitely more powerful than the 5.56 mm you probably used in the army. Would you like to shoot more?”

“Yes.”

“At 100, 150, and 250 meters, the targets will appear.”

With that, Cha Ji-hye pushes a red button on the wall.

Bbik-

With a weird sound, the target practice starts.

At 100 meters, a black target stands up.

Tang!

Hit in the center and it falls over.

And then a target appears at 250 meters. Well, no problem.

Tang-

Without effort, the target falls backwards.

I shoot all 5 bullets and Cha Ji-hye hands me another clip with 5 bullets. Like I learned earlier, I load the clip and reshoot.

Tang! Tang! Tang!

How much am I shooting.

Click.

Huh? What noise is this?

I look behind me and Cha Ji-hye is holding a smartphone.

As I look at her with a confused face, she gets slightly flustered and tells me.

“We, we don’t have any information on spirits so with this opportunity, I would like to gather some, is it okay to keep filming?”

“Yes, of course.”

From then on she openly films Sylph with her smartphone, and her facial expression is happy-go-lucky like it was when she was at the café and ordered all those sweets.

...She must like Sylph. She could’ve just said so.

I whisper to Sylph.

“Want to assume a more cute position?”

-Meow.

From then on, Sylph changes into a cat model.

She wraps the rifle in her tail to aim, and acts cute hanging from the rifle like a koala bear. Click, click, the camera shots become more frequent. Seeing how she likes it, it makes me happy too. No girl hates a cat, yep.

Cha Ji-hye is all excited taking pictures when all of a sudden, she asks.

“I would like to ask one thing.”

“What is it?”

“Do you have to shoot the gun?”

“...What?”

“It doesn’t seem like there’s a reason for you to have to hold the gun.”

“Oh, uh...”

I become blank.

Yeah, why do I have to shoot?

Sylph aims for me anyway. I only decide where to shoot and when to pull the trigger.

“Sylph, you want to shoot?”

Sylph nods her head and takes over the Mosin-Nagant from me.

Cha Ji-hye rushes over and gives up a 5 bullet clip. But why is she respectfully give it with both hands? Sylph uses her tail to take the clip.

Click, click.

With skilled movements, she puts in the clip and aims. What, what, like a veteran soldier! Veteran cat warrior?

“Amazing...”

Without even realizing her thought came out her mouth, Cha Ji-hye is frantically taking pictures.

With adorable front paws and tail, Sylph lifts the Mosin-Nagant and aims. It's a relatively serious expression but even that is cute. The upgrade from puss in boots!

“Now, now start.”

Cha Ji-hye pushes the red button again.

The 150-meter target gets up.

Tang!

Sylph shoots without restraint.

100 meter, 250 meter, 250 meter, 150 meter. Sylph shoots them down as they get up. After shooting all 5 bullets, she swiftly changes another clip that Cha Ji-hye hands her and continues to shoot.

Tang!

The 250-meter target falls onto its back. It was extremely fast. The shooting speed and reloading speed were both way faster than me.

“She's like Simo Häyhä.”

Cha Ji-hye has an enraptured expression on her face and mumbles.

“Who is that?”

“He is a sniper from Finland that shot 100 people in 542 days. [Simo Häyhä's](#) rifle was a Mosin-Nagant as well.”

(TN: From Wiki: Simo “Simuna” Häyhä nicknamed “White Death” by the Red Army, was a Finnish marksman. Using a Finnish M/28-30 rifle (a Finnish variant of the Mosin–Nagant rifle) in the Winter War, he is reported as having killed 505 men, the highest recorded number of confirmed sniper kills in any major war.)

“Oh, I see.”

To be reminded of a monster sniper like that at seeing cute Sylph, I wonder if this woman has normal sensibilities.

But I get it, Sylph is the best shooter.

Without even the slightest delay, she shoot-shoots the targets down, never missing once!

-Meow?

Sylph turns back to look at me with a cute cry. She has a face

asking me if she has to continue.

Click, click, its loud. Camera sounds.

-Meow!

Sylph returns the gun to me and sits gently atop my shoulder. A glimpse of disappointment passes by Cha Ji-hye's face.

She asks me, with her normal hard expression returned.

“How is the spirit summons consumed?”

“Hm, I don't know. I'll check.”

I call on the board and check to see how much of Sylph's summons time is left.

“Compared to when I shoot, it uses more. It must be because she has to carry the gun and get rid of the recoil of the shot. But that being said, it isn't a huge difference.”

“Then we don't really need you... I mean, I think there's no need for you to shoot.”

“Just now you were almost about to say I'm not needed, huh?”

“No.”

“Yes, you did.”

“No.”

“... Fine, let's say you didn't. But if Sylph holds the gun, when we fight, what will I do?”

At my question, Cha Ji-hye doesn't know what to say.

“Why aren't you saying anything?”

“Hm, couldn't you stand next to her and hold the bullets and take the role of handing her the bullets?”

“What is that!”

I say in my temper.

“Is there a problem?”

“Am I Sylph's assistant?”

“You are the one that summons Sylph, so of course not.”

“It’s so, so pathetic!”

Sylph’s the marksmen and I’m the help? The role of holding bullets next to her while Sylph shoots the gun! My dead-shooter confidence collapses in a rush.

“What does it matter if you look a little insignificant?”

“So you acknowledge that it would look insignificant?”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“No.”

Cha Ji-hye has some thick skin.

“The fact that in a fight you are free is a big advantage.”

“What?”

“While Simo, I mean Sylph, shoots, you can fight the approaching enemy with your comrades. Remember, you did get the physical strength buff entry level 4.”

This woman, was she just about to call Sylph by Simo Häyhä?

“Besides the Mosin-Nagant I have the magic rifle, can I not use that?”

“I have something to say on that matter but first, won’t you come to the briefing with the other members?”

Now that I think of it, Kang Chun-seong, Joon-ho, and Hye-su, are all here.

“Sure.”

“Hyun-ho oppa!”

“Hyung!”

I go inside the meeting room and Hye-su and Joon-ho welcome me.

“How have you been? The training isn’t too bad?”

“Ah, it’s really hard.”

“Really? And you Hye-su? Hey? Hye-su?”

Hye-su's expression was greatly shadowed.

“Are you okay?”

“My body...”

“Huh? What about your body?”

“We are getting such high level training to the point of overtaxing our bodies. Since we can go through the exam door with a hurt body...”

It's a good thought.

Once you pass through the exam door, your body becomes totally rejuvenated.

Because of it, they can train you extremely hard without worrying. For skill-less Hye-su to become useful in a short time, there's no other choice.

“It must be hard. But if you are to survive, there's no choice.”

“I know. I'm going to get through it.”

Hye-su looks at me and beams a smile.

“I can’t get protected forever. I want to be a help to you too, Hyun-ho oppa.”

At that moment I almost embrace Hye-su. I barely stop myself!

Then the meeting door opens and Cha Ji-hye walks in.

“I am sorry I am late.”

Cha Ji-hye’s ambivalent expression is, oddly today, very flushed.

The reason is simple.

-Meow.

Sylph is sitting on top of her head.

She seemed to really like Sylph so I told Sylph to stay with her. As expected, she is completely excited because of Sylph.

“You’re a bit late?”

“I had a lot of things to gather.”

“Were you playing with Sylph?”

She slightly glares at me.

“No-no, of course not.”

Cha Ji-hye is totally surprised and mumbles.

‘They were playing.’

She probably excitedly took a bunch of selfies with Sylph.

“Uh-hm, anyway, from now on we are going to be doing a very important briefing so please pay attention.”

She turns on the notebook she brought and opens up the screen on the connected projector.

A large map appears on the screen.

It looks like an old-school map that was cumulatively drawn by hand, with odd proportions.

“This is Arena.”

‘That?’

We are so surprised we stare at the map like a laser. Then again, there’s no satellites in Arena so the map must be crude. It must be

a map made on the basis of examinees.

“Do you see the forest at the southwest corner of the map?”

The large land mass shows a forest at its southwestern edge.

“That forest is the location for where you will all be.”

“How can you know that?”

“Up to what has been revealed, there are two red ape habitats. Of the two, the large forest you all have mentioned is most likely that location.”

“Let’s say that we we did our 1st and 2nd turns there, will we have the 3rd one in that forest?”

It’s Joon-ho’s question.

Cha Ji-hye nods her head.

“An exam’s start location is always the end location of the previous exam.”

“Then we will continue to do our exams in that forest then?”

At Joon-ho’s question, this time, Cha Ji-hye shakes her head.

“Look at this.”

The screen changes.

[Previous world examinees’ cumulative trends

1st turn: examinees talent/qualification test. Often starts in the wilderness, no humans.

2nd turn: a teamwork test with comrades.

3rd, 4th turn: move away from the wilderness, enter Arena’s locals’ society.]

“These are calculated trends based on shared logged data about this world. Looking at this, your 3rd turn exam moving away from the forest is a very high possibility.”

They can make an educated guess in advance about the 3rd exam. It’s like an aptitude test. This is the benefit of receiving aid from a state institution.

“If you look at the next page you can see more definitive data.”

As the screen changes, the entirety of the Arena map zooms into

the southwestern forest.

The forest is marked into districts.

[Arena SW forest area

Forest center: red ape habitat

Forest east: lycanthrope-infested area

Forest west: unidentified

Forest south: unidentified

Forest north: troll-infested area]

“You are all in the forest center and to get out of the forest, you will have to decide on either the east or north directions.”

“So we have to decide between lycanthropes or trolls.”

“Indeed. And we suggest going through the eastern lycanthrope-infested area.”

“Why so?”

“Mr. Kim Hyun-ho, you use guns well, but as much of a big advantage guns can be, their limits are just as clear. From now on, you will meet enemies you cannot combat with guns, and amongst them, are trolls.”

“... I guess the lycanthropes will be better.”

If the gun doesn't work, none of our teams' attacks will work. For now, our teams strongest attack method is the gun.

Chapter 32 - What Do You Want Me To Do (Part 2)

The screen changes again.

[Lycanthrope characteristics]

Wolf human.

Acts as a group.

Has intelligence equal to humans.

Can change into a human, during its change, has command of human language.]

Another group behavior monster.

In an unfamiliar forest. We definitely experienced how hard it is being chased by a group that is familiar within that forest.

“Lycanthropes are much stronger than red apes and possess the olfactory and auditory capabilities equal to a wolf, the next turn will be much harder than the 2nd turn.”

‘Ugh.’

Smell and hearing like a wolf. It means it will move to pursue a

lot quicker than the red apes.

“Of course, you have all become a lot stronger and there is a chance of winning, but there is one disadvantage.”

“You mean Hye-su?”

I say it.

“Yes.”

Hye-su is pricked and depresses her head. I tap Hye-su on the shoulder. I didn't point it out to criticize her, I'm being realistic to find our weakness and a security plan for it.

“Lee Hye-su, with her 150 karma, used 100 to get the physical strength buff entry level 1 to reinforce her most problematic issue, physical inadequacy, and is taking a crash course training on sword wielding.”

Cha Ji-hye's words continue.

“But still, it is true that she is still weaker than the rest of the team, and if one doesn't contribute to the exam, the amount of karma that is earned dwindles that much more and it will become a vicious circle of the gap in skills getting bigger.”

“I'm thinking there's no way around it, but is there any kind of

security measure?”

I ask.

Cha Ji-hye nods her head.

“Kim Hyun-ho, would you transfer your magic gun to Lee Hye-su?”

“The magic gun to Hye-su? You want to have her fight with the gun?”

“No. It is to get a karma refund on the magic gun.”

Refund?!

“Is that possible?”

“It’s impossible with skills, but you can get a half refund for items. Since the magic gun is worth 100 karma, if you refund, you can get 50 karma back.”

Cha Ji-hye’s explanation followed.

“Currently, Hye-su has 50 karma.

And after receiving my magic gun, that’s a 50 karma refund.

With those 100 karma, the strategy is to gain an item that is necessary for the team, and increasing her contribution.”

“An item we definitely need?”

“It’s called an item bag.”

Cha Ji-hye handles the remote. On the projector, the screen changes.

[Item bag (small).

Size: 32x22x8

Material: magic treated leather

Function: store non-itemized items and pass the exam door.

Price: 100 karma]

“Here, store medicine and medical supplies and the bullets you, Kim Hyun-ho, will use, and take it to Arena. If Ms. Lee Hye-su can act as the medic, that will be plenty contribution to the team.”

This is it!

Preparations for the 3rd turn exam progressed smoothly.

Kang Chun-seong received a new identity but continued to reside at the research center and do self-regulated training.

Joon-ho received training on how to use a shield and spear from a spear instructor.

The one doing the most difficult training was Hye-su. It's because she has to fence and do emergency care at the same time.

In terms of the fencing, in order to be able to use it in short notice, vertical cut, horizontal cut, stab, she did these three moves over and over like her life depended on it, so as to make her body remember them.

On the other hand, she was sweating bullets trying to learn medicinal uses and emergency medical care.

“At this rate, she may faint before the day of the exam. Shouldn't the training intensity be lowered a bit for her condition?”

“That is not necessary.”

“What?”

Cha Ji-hye was so firm to the point that I almost get embarrassed.

“Condition adjustment is not necessary. An intensity just at the level to harm the body is good. Anyway, when the body passes through the exam door, it goes to its prime condition.”

“Ah!”

They set up the training keeping that in mind. They aren’t a state institution for nothing.

“But what will I do?”

“...”

She suddenly doesn’t have anything to say.

“Should I practice handing bullets off to Sylph?”

“...”

“Oh, when Sylph uses the gun, I can count the bullets, or I could practice picking up pellets?”

“Okay, fine. Would you like to learn mixed martial arts?”

“Mixed martial arts?”

“Because we don’t have many rest days left, I’m not sure learning will increase your skill, but in the least, sparring and becoming familiar with fighting will be a help when fighting lycanthropes.”

“That sounds good.”

Cha Ji-hye takes me to the 4th floor basement training center of the research facility.

It is as expansive as the 5th floor shooting range and in it, a vast assortment of exercise equipment. In the middle are a couple fight rings.

“This is an incredible setup.”

“It is for the training of examinees who are in general in very good shape, so the setup is good.”

“But no one is here.”

“...”

“I really wanted to ask but how many contracted examinees are

with the Korean Arena Research Center?”

“Including your team, 67.”

“67 people?!”

I’m surprised, it’s more than I thought.

“It is on the smaller side but we are within the 50 world rankers.”

“World ranker? What is that?”

I’m confused. A world ranker? Perhaps, maybe, are there exams with examinees against each other? No way.

“It is ranked based on the total karma earned from the exams. There is no examinee that wishes to divulge what weapon or what skill they have, but simply converting total karma doesn’t matter.”

“Is verifying that possible?”

“Verifying is impossible. The contracted institution would never reveal any detailed examinee information.”

“Then one could lie to increase the ranking.”

“That is true, but there are not many instances of that. The

applicable examinees sum karma is revealed by their contracted institution, but if they increase an examinees ranking higher than it is, it would only increase the worth and cost of that examinee to them.”

“Ah...”

“On top of that, if your ranking is high, all the more, other institutions will grow jealous and take examinees by offering higher salaries.”

“So an examinee could lie to his or her institution to raise his or her price then?”

“Tricking is nearly impossible. Through observation it is possible to see about what skill level and what item and examinee has.”

It means even if you blow smoke, the researchers meticulously observe and analyze and the estimate comes out.

Suddenly, I’m really curious.

What about the opposite?

‘Can’t you hide your skills?’

For example, I earned 900 karma from the exam, but I could lie and say it was 700, and use the 200 elsewhere. Like this, I can

secretly grow my strength.

Just in case, hiding the real strength.

... Have I read too many martial arts novels?

It's a childish notion, but the more I think on it, it's not that bad an idea.

Even if the Korean Arena Research Center is a state institution, I cannot trust it 100%. I don't know how the situation may change if the power or responsible entity changes.

I cannot trust completely so it might be dangerous to reveal my everything.

‘I should think on this more.’

“Okay, come on up.”

‘Hm?’

Only then do I awaken from thinking and look at Cha Ji-hye, and she is in the ring. She has UFC open finger gloves on both hands.

“Huh?”

“Put on gloves and come up.”

“What are you doing right now?”

“Sparring.”

“No, where’s the instructor?”

“It’s me.”

“...”

“...”

The silence flows for a while.

“Uh, will you be okay?”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m a man and I got stronger with the physical strength buff so for weight and strength...”

“Oh, that is what you meant?”

She nods her head as if she just understood and Cha Ji-hye

speaks.

“Where were you in the army?”

“...3rd ammunitions depot.”

“That is rear quartermaster corps. I was in the navy special forces for 7 years, and practice muay thai from a young age.”

“ ... ”

I'm sorry I overlooked you.

I put on open finger gloves and enter the ring.

“Then let's begin.”

“No, wait, like this, abruptly? Teach me a little something...”

“Raise your guard.”

Oh, thanks for teaching me something good. With that, even a beginner can box real well.

I look at Cha Ji-hye approaching me using her footwork and raise my guard.

Puk!

Ah, right, there's kicks. I was thinking boxing.

How shall I say, it's like being pushed and pulled.

I'm surprised that it doesn't hurt as much as I thought it would when a low kick strikes my legs. When I easily avoid a flying left jab, I realize my opponent is a woman. A woman who, without choice, is slower and weaker than a man.

‘What, this isn't so bad.’

With my mind at ease, when the left jab slowly flies at me again, I easily avoid it and I counterattack with a punch.

... As I do so, this woman, as if she was waiting for it, speedily counters with a right hook. As I stumble she throws a left, right, high kick combo!

After viciously getting beat, I realize Cha Ji-hye is very strong.

She pretended to be weak and made me careless and then relentlessly beat me!

“The lycanthropes will be twice as fast as me.”

“Ugh”

I grab my chin and get up.

“I only got hit once, why does it hurt so bad?”

“If you get hit by a counter like that, no matter how strong, you’ll fall down.”

“Knowing that, you mercilessly beat me. Thank you.”

“We shall continue.”

She continued, moving with footwork left and right, attacking me.

It must be the power of the physical strength buff. Her being a woman, my strength and agility are above her. I avoided or blocked the average attack with reflexes.

But then, from a sudden flurry of combinations, I cannot get my head straight. She blinds my gaze with a jab and then flies over a low kick, pretends to punch with a feint, and then high kicks.

“If you are getting acclimated now, I will include elbows.”

“Eh?”

I’m dying from pain right now, and you want elbows?

Cha Ji-hye sends over a left jab. I think she’ll follow with an elbow so I raise my guard with both arms.

But then she suddenly grabs my neck with both hands and jumps up high.

Bbuk!

“Gguek!”

From my mouth a sound, far from dignified, shoots out. Anyone who suffers a direct hit to the solar plexus will make this sound.

“El-elbows, you said...”

“You are denser than I thought. Like someone who’s never exercised or played sports before.”

“Any exercise I’ve ever done is just some hiking.”

“Do you not possess 1st degree in Taekwondo.”

“I just went through the motions for about a week in the army and they just gave it to me. They tossed those degrees around like coupons.”

“ ... ”

She takes off her gloves.

“This won’t do. It will be better for you to make a wooden spear like you did in the second exam. Do not, under any circumstance, face against a lycanthrope. Hold it off with the wooden spear and in urgent need, use the spirit.”

“Ugg, okay.”

I sigh.

At best, I got the entry level 4 physical strength buff but it’s like pearls around a pig’s neck. The role most befitting me right now is obediently holding bullets next to the gun shooting Sylph.

I return home and no one’s home. I use Sylph to clean the house and afterwards, out of boredom, I summon my new weapon.

“Weapon.”

As I say so, in my right hand is the hefty rifle, Mosin-Nagant. It shows signs of being old, but I sense its vintage charm.

I gave Hye-su my magic gun and along with it the bullets and belt, and from now on, this is my weapon.

Max range is a staggering 548 meters.

It's an antique, old enough it was used in Czarist Russia, and it makes me a little nervous, but I did confirm its performance at the shooting range earlier today. Well, Sylph did.

They say snipers of the world wars used this so I guess I'll believe in it.

‘Do me well.’

I pet the Mosin-Nagant and whisper in my heart.

Time left until the next exam, 11 days.

Chapter 33 - Examinees (Part 1)

I think I frugally used the 15 days of the rest period. I split it here and split it there and used it preciously. Even so, time went by so fast.

-Name: Kim Hyun-ho

-Class: 5

-Karma: 0

-Mission: Rest until the next exam.

-Time limit: 10 hours 21 minutes

As it became the day of the exam, the Korean Arena Research Center came to pick me up. I tell my family I am going on a trip with friends and leave the house.

I take the car to the army base heliport and take a helicopter and arrive at the research center.

The research center heliport is a commotion.

It's because there is more than one helicopter arriving.

Out of a helicopter that lands almost at the same time as me, three people get out.

It is two guys and one lady, looking to be about late 20's to middle 30's.

“Ugh, so annoying. I hope this exam finishes within a week.”

Complains the girl with dyed blonde hair who looks to be about my age.

“The last exam took 2 months right? It was like aging 60 days in one night...”

As the small and gentle looking guy sighs, the blonde girl covers her face with her hair and cries out.

“No, I don't want to! I don't want to get old! I don't want to be in my 30's!”

Hm, definitely. She's the same age as me.

The guy with a bulky frame sees all this and laughs.

‘They're examinees!’

Aside from my teammates, this is the first time seeing other examinees. I never met one in the research center.

The three discover me.

“Eh? Who?”

The blonde girl shows her curiosity.

“Isn’t he a rookie?”

Says the guy with the good build.

“Can’t know that. He could be a veteran examinee scouted over from China.”

“Just ask.”

The blonde girl, without hesitation, comes towards me.

“Hi? Who are you?”

With a white shirt and short hot pants, her bare legs so openly exposed, she’s an impressionable woman. With plenty of playfulness with speech lacking etiquette, she reminds me of a high school delinquent.

Speaking informally from the get-go, if I come out too respectful, won't it feel like I'm losing from the start?

“Ni men da jia hao.”

I greet her using all the Chinese I know.

The startled blonde girl turns around to the guys and speaks.

“It's true! They really must have brought him from China.”

“They treat their examinees like shit so it's easy to scout them. Public security officer surveillance is strict so if he got smuggled out, does that mean he's really good?”

“Don't jump to a conclusion so fast. He could be from Taiwan.”

The three people get into a debate about me.

The blonde woman looks at me with eyes full of curiosity and talks.

“Um, nice to meet you. Are, you, um... tester? Magic? Or fighter?”

English ability at an easily understood level.

“Wuh dduh ming deo shao watda pang tsu su.”

I spew out stuff to sound anything like Chinese. The blonde woman is flustered.

“Uh, do it in English, guy. You don’t know English? English! I thought Chinese people were good at English?”

She talks like she knows English.

“Wang shao ming ni dduh ling...”

It was when I was in the midst of flustering the blonde woman, playing Chinese man.

“Mr. Kim Hyun-ho, what are you doing over there?”

From behind me, I hear the short cadence of a business like woman’s voice.

It’s Cha Ji-hye.

I laugh and reply.

“I was pretending to be Chinese.”

The blonde woman goes blank at my words. The two guys too, go

blank.

“Hahahahaha!”

The guy with the good build explodes in laughter. The gentle looking guy laughs too.

“Ugh, what! You suddenly spoke in Chinese and surprised me!”

The blonde woman gets angry at me.

“Should I have spoken in English?”

“Ugh, I’m so mad! What are you? An examinee?”

“Yes.”

“What turn?”

“...”

If I’m honest and tell her 2nd turn, she’ll probably look down on me as a newbie.

I was going to be vague and say it’s a secret when.

“This is 2nd turn examinee, Mr. Kim Hyun-ho. Welcome him.”

Cha Ji-hye! You inconsiderate woman!

As expected, the blonde woman squints her eyes.

“Pft, 2nd turn?”

“And you?”

“Oh ho, this noona is 19th turn.”

19th turn?!

I’m taken by surprise.

If she has passed the 19th turn, just how strong is she?

“Oh ho, surprised? You want to learn a lot from this noona now, huh?”

“There will be lots to learn. These people are on their 19th turn, and are veterans that have cleared 14 exams.”

At Cha Ji-hye’s explanation, this time, I squint my eyes.

“So they’ve failed 5 times?”

“So, so what? You think there’s an examinee that’s cleared all exams without failing?”

You cannot succeed in all the exams?

I’m surprised at those words.

Now that I think about it, it’s true. Our teams Hye-su failed the first exam. But she did not die and is still living. You just need to be able to handle the minus karma penalty.

“In the instance of failing, how is the penalty? Is it manageable?”

The blonde woman shrugs her shoulders.

“Just like being given karma for succeeding the exam, if you fail, it gets taken away. It depends and is evaluated on how hard we tried how much will we had.”

“So an exam failure doesn’t always mean death.”

“Yea, the thing to be fearful of is death. You guys are now going into the 3rd turn?”

“Yes.”

“I don’t want to say anything useless to make your condition worse, but be careful. We all each lost a comrade in 2nd and 3rd turn. It’s the 2nd, 3rd jinx.”

Jinx?

At her words my heart chills.

For us too, one person died in the 2nd turn. I did kill him, but dead is dead.

Is this a jinx?

“There is no jinx.”

Cha Ji-hye interrupts the conversation.

“From a common sense standpoint, it is reasonable to have casualties in 2nd, 3rd turns with still new examinees. But in the case of Mr. Kim Hyun-ho’s team, in comparison to other teams, his team is qualitatively superior, and will have no problems.”

“Hey, really? If Ji-hye unni says that, you guys must have a pretty good chance.”

Unni?

“Are you in your 30’s?”

“If I am?”

At my question, Cha Ji-hye’s face becomes cold. Crap, I’ve never seen her angry face before.

“You, you look young for your age. I thought you, Miss Ji-hye, were a lot younger.”

At those words, Cha Ji-hye’s face opens up but this time, the blonde woman gets angry.

“You wanna die?”

“He just told the truth.”

“If you count the time spent in Arena, aren’t you girls pretty much the same age?”

At the two men’s comments, the blonde woman is boiling almost to the point of explosion.

Cha Ji-hye quickly intercedes.

“You should all introduce yourselves to each other. You may

have to meet and carry out the exam in the Arena later.”

“Humph, I’m Yoo Ji-soo. And I’m 29.”

The blonde woman is Yoo Ji-soo.

“Cha Jin-hyuk, 33.”

The guy with the good build is Cha Jin-hyuk.

“Lee Ji-yong. I’m 33 too.”

The small and kind looking man is Lee Ji-yong.

Blond woman Yoo Ji-soo adds on.

“Also, I’m the team leader. These kids are like my concubines, hahaha.”

“Shut up.”

“Don’t say things that can be misconstrued.”

The two guys quickly oppose.

This girl’s manners could not get any worse. To call her elders

kids. Cha Jin-hyuk looks like he might hold a temper but seeing as how he permits it, it looks like he gave up a long time ago.

“I am Kim Hyun-ho and I am 29.”

“Huh? You’re the same age as me.”

“If you combine the time spent in Arena, I am younger.”

“Shut up.”

Yoo Ji-hye quickly gets serious.

On the research center’s 1st floor basement is a place called the examinee waiting room.

There is a wide hall, and in the hallway are bedroom accommodations for examinees all lined up, and on the other side, a cluster of cabinets.

“Oppa.”

“Hyung!”

Hye-su and Joon-ho heartily welcome me. The two look drained

of their energies.

“Are you guys okay? You don’t look so good.”

“It is because of the overexertion due to highly intense training. It will make a full recovery upon passing through the exam door so do not worry.”

Cha Ji-hye answers for them.

“My arms and legs don’t move very well. I’d rather just hurry up and go to the exam.”

Joon-ho is about to cry. Hye-su must agree cause with a miserable face, she nods her head up and down.

On another note, the Yoo Ji-soo group that came in with me go to each of their cabinets as soon as they arrive. From the cabinets, they grab all kinds of garments and go into the bedrooms.

Silently doing what they need to, it seems familiar to them. Then again, they are 19th turn veterans.

A moment later, they have changed clothes and come out, and their appearance is indeed unusual.

“What? Fallen for me?”

Yoo Ji-soo jokingly asks me.

“No. What kind of look is that?”

“No choice. If you wear Earth clothes in Arena, it’s too obvious. You have to have an outfit that is common in Arena. And inside, wear the battle suit.”

The three people are wearing Renaissance period’s modern European style clothing. Leather boots, gloves, a cloak even with a hood, they look like they came out of a European folk village.

“No need to stare so interestedly. You guys have to dress like this too?”

Only then do I turn my gaze to the cabinets. Amongst the cabinets, there are those with our names on it.

“Should we change in advance too? Since we have to get used to the battle suit and clothes.”

“Yeah, lets.”

Eventually, our team changes clothes too. In each individually labelled cabinet is a battle suit, Arena clothing and shoes, all prepared in the correct size.

I go into the bedroom to change clothes and the battle suit over

my underwear reminds me of Superman's outfit. The flexibility is surprisingly good and doesn't make it uncomfortable at all and its temperature control is good so that I probably won't get cold out in the open.

‘This is some incredible clothing. Didn't they say it isn't easily penetrated by knives either?’

As I stare at my tight fitting battle suit, I take a little time to admire my graceful body again.

On top of that I wear a cloth material shirt and pants tightened with a strong and boots. With the hooded cloak on, sure makes me look like I'm cosplaying.

‘This is a little embarrassing.’

After getting all dressed and coming out, all the teammates have changed as well. It looks like Joon-ho and Hye-su are also a little embarrassed about their outfits. Chic Kang Chun-seong doesn't seem phased.

“Why did they provide us with a cloak? It hangs and swishes and is a bit uncomfortable.”

At Joon-ho's question, Lee Ji-yong from Yoo Ji-soo's team kindly offers an explanation.

“When you are out, you can use it as a blanket, and in a fight, it

can work as armor. In the Arena world, it's a necessity for a traveler so it would be good to get used to it quick."

"Ah... thank you for the friendly explanation."

"Don't mention it. Oh, I assumed I was older so I spoke informally, is that okay?"

"Of course. I am Lee Joon-ho and I am still 20 years old."

"Such struggles at a young age. I am Lee Ji-yong. This is Yoo Ji-soo and he's Cha Jin-hyuk."

And thus we introduced ourselves with Yoo Ji-soo's team.

We still had 9 hours until the exam time so we spent the time conversing with one another.

Then suddenly Cha Jin-hyuk speaks.

"Over there, you said you are Kang Chun-seong?"

"I am."

"I sense an extraordinary aura, you're really a 2nd turn?"

"You sense?"

“Ah, don’t know yet? When you get to aura control entry level 6, you can sense others’ aura. As the level increases, your detectability develops.”

“Is that so.”

“But if you’re a 2nd turn and learned your aura control, you must barely be at entry level 1, and your aura is a bit weird?”

“I am entry level 5.”

At those words, I’m surprised too.

Not too long ago, Kang Chun-seong was at level 4. In that time, he’s gone up another level?

Chapter 34 - Examinees (Part 2)

“Level 5?”

Cha Jin-hyuk’s face is in astonishment.

“You lying?”

It’s a very Yoo Ji-soo style frankness.

“I can’t see how realistically, a 2nd turn examinee would have enough karma to lift his main skill to entry level 5...”

Well-mannered Lee Ji-yong too is of the notion that it’s too hard to believe.

But Kang Chun-seong merely scoffs and doesn’t look like he is going to explain, whether he’s misconstrued or not. Eventually, I stepped in and explained.

“You were that incredible of a martial artist?”

Cha Jin-hyuk’s eyes become provocative.

“I kind of want to see your skills. How about it, martial artist man? A light warming up before the exam, yeah?”

“As much as you wish.”

Kang Chun-seong gladly accepts. Even in front of 19th turn veterans, he doesn't seem frightened at all.

“Will he be okay?”

Hye-su worries and asks me. I nod my head.

“There's no problem as long as he doesn't die. Since you completely recuperate when you go through the exam door. We're wearing these battle suits and these kinds of clothes for the first time, so warming up might be a good idea.”

The two people get up from their seats and move to the empty space in the hall.

Across from Kang Chun-seong assuming his position, Cha Jin-hyuk puts both fists up in a boxing pose. Is that guy not going to use a weapon either?

“There is one thing I'm curious about.”

“What is it?”

“With Chinese martial arts, you gather that chi by dancing around right? Does that help in an actual fight?”

Cha Jin-hyuk's provocation. Kang Chun-seong's eyes twitch.

"I will show you."

Kang Chun-seong shifts just his feet and slowly narrows the distance. It's a method of slowly moving forward by using his heels and toes as an axis.

As he gets within punching distance, Cha Jin-hyuk lightly extends a jab. Then,

Pat!

"...!"

Counter timing the jab, Kang Chun-seong dives in.

In an instant, Kang Chun-seong shortens the distance and sends flying a flurry of punches.

Papapapapak!

A storm of punches lands above Cha Jin-hyuk's guard.

It's an incredible speed. Firmly blocking the serenade of punches, Cha Jin-hyuk reacts with a knee kick. At that moment.

Pat!

Kang Chun-seong, with both feet stuck to the ground, moves his body 360 degrees and strikes the knee. Is that a Baguazhang move? Regardless, it's amazing.

Puk!

“Kuk!”

At the moment he does the knee kick and supplanted leg takes a hit, Cha Jin-hyuk loses his balance and falters. Kang Chun-seong strikes his leg once more and he falls down.

“Ah, damn! It's strong, Chinese martial arts!”

Mumbles Cha Jin-hyuk as he abruptly gets up.

“Want to continue?”

“What are you jabbering about? This is just the start?”

Cha Jin-hyuk moves in.

But without being able to do a single proper attack, he gets cornered into defending again.

He attempted to attack with light jabs but Kang Chun-seong countered the jabs again with impeccable timing and struck.

Puk!

“Kuk!”

Hit by a punch, Cha Jin-hyuk’s chin shifts to the side.

After that, Kang Chun-seong makes big swirls with his arms, like a windmill. The left arm pushes the chest, the right arm grabs the leg, and just like that, knocks Cha Jin-hyuk backwards.

Kudang!

“Uk!”

Cha Jin-hyuk has fallen on his back again.

Kang Chun-seong does not attack any further and steps back as he speaks.

“Stop here. It is pointless.”

“What?”

Cha Jin-hyuk bursts.

“Hahaha! Totally got your ass whooped!”

“Shut up!”

Cha Jin-hyuk gets angry at Yoo Ji-soo’s laughter.

Kang Chun-seong speaks.

“That is all.”

“What, you saying even if we fight more you’ll still win?”

At Cha Jin-hyuk’s question, Kang Chun-seong replies in his usual steady voice.

“Regardless of how many times, I will win. As long as you don’t pull out a sword.”

Cha Jin-hyuk for sure, and Yoo Ji-soo and Lee Ji-yong’s faces are all in shock.

‘So that’s it. I thought so, they were too weak to be 19th turn veterans.’

Even though Kang Chun-seong is strong, a 19th turn veteran would have more skills with that much more karma. With that in

account, Cha Jin-hyuk now was too weak.

It's because he wasn't using his weapon.

“Wow, he's a fortune teller.”

Yoo Ji-soo is in awe.

“Caught?”

Cha Jin-hyuk scratches his head.

“Do not think yourself to be on top of my head, rookie.”

“Haha, rookie is a bit harsh. Can't help it. I haven't done martial arts my whole life like you.”

“He was a car mechanic~”

“Shut up.”

Cha Jin-hyuk gets upset at Yoo Ji-soo's slight tattling.

“How did you know I use a sword?”

“Distance. You maintained a stance further than the distance for

a jab. Also...”

Kang chun-seong continues to speak.

“Energy, whose concept of mental significance was discussed by Mencius (Chinese philosopher), in regards to martial arts, is one perspective of looking at the mind and body altogether, not some supernatural energy.”

“ ... ”

“Saying swerving and dancing sounds like something you gathered from perhaps watching tai chi, but that is the same. It is a practice of learning the body’s circulation and movement together through breathing. If you are lazy in that, like you, your legs and arms will move separate from each other, your attack and defense will act separately, and your aura will act alone.”

“Ah, this lesson is a gem. Did you hear? You should write it down and learn.”

Yoo Ji-soo is chattering.

“Shut up, you bitch. Hey, what did you say? It’s the practice of learning the body’s circulation and movement together through breathing?”

Cha Jin-hyuk asks to Kang Chun-seong.

“That is so.”

“Then is hypogastric breathing type stuff in the same context?”

“It can be seen as such.”

“So you’re saying you raised your aura control level with that?”

“I have done this all my life. It can be said that I reviewed and applied that concept of Chi to aura.”

“What did you say chi was? Explain it again.”

Cha Jin-hyuk must have grown some interest, because he asks Kang Chun-seong this and that, and every time, Kang Chun-seong gives a short but clear answer. The situation has changed from a duel to a lecture.

A whole while later, Cha Jin-hyuk’s face shows a look of satisfaction.

“Hm, nice. I will consult this.”

“As you want.”

“I learned a lot of good stuff, so I’ll pay it forward. Retrieve, item

bag.”

As he does so, in Cha Jin-hyuk’s hand, appears a small cross-body bag.

From the cross-body bag, Cha Jin-hyuk takes out a bottle holding a red liquid.

“Here, take this.”

Kang Chun-seong receives the bottle of red liquid.

“It’s a healing potion. It immediately heals wounds. It’s precious so use it only in an emergency. It has no effect on illness or physical decline, so use it only for wounds.”

Kang Chun-seong takes a close look at the healing potion, and hands it to Hye-su.

“Pack it.”

“Yes...”

Hye-su too summons her item bag and puts the healing potion in it, but Hye-su’s item bag is already full the bullets for my Mosin-Nagant and first aid items, that it doesn’t go in very well.

“Ugh, give it here.”

Yoo Ji-soo can't stand the sight and helps out. She shoves the healing potion into the item bag until it looks like it will burst. I'm worried it might rip the bag but surprisingly, it fits.

“The item bag is really sturdy. You can just shove things in and it won't burst, so don't worry.”

“Oh, thank you.”

As our team's [sunbae](#), Yoo Ji-soo gives us a lot of tips.

(TN: a word that refers to people with more experience)

We spent time like this, and when there was 3 hours left until the exam, Cha Ji-hye appeared.

“Are you all ready?”

“Yes.”

“Then you may all go into your individual rooms. There cannot be an instance where you take off any items of clothing before the exam begins. There was an instance when someone took off their shoes and entered the exam that way.”

“Duly noted.”

We go into our rooms. Yoo Ji-soo's team bids us as they go into their rooms.

“Let's see each other tomorrow. Even though it's not a tomorrow for us.”

“Let's live and see each other again.”

I am in my room and lay still in my bed.

This is now the third exam. This time, with the help of the research center, we have really systematically prepared.

But as the time draws closer, I can't help but be anxious. The words '2nd, 3rd turn jinx' keep going around in my head and make me feel uneasy.

‘No one can die this turn.’

I do not regret Park Go-chan's death. He had to die.

But this time is only good comrades. Joon-ho, Hye-su, Kang Chun-seong, I really hope no one dies.

And the time is close.

I summon my board to check the time and see a second left, and lose consciousness.

As soon as I come to, I check my teammates. Joon-ho, Hye-su, Kang Chun-seong, everyone is here together.

We just get our bearings and the tedious baby angel bastard, dangling his bbundegi, flaps his way towards us.

“Welcome. Glad to see me?”

“ ... ”

“Wow, seeing your attire, it looks like you are all look fully prepared for battle.”

“We did learn of a world we didn’t know existed.”

Nations individually recruit examinees and have institutions that aid them, and who knew that they even rank the examinees based on the karma they accrue?

Not to mention, they are gathering to use the majeong that examinees bring back from Arena, to use as energy.

‘Something is strange...’

“What’s strange?”

“Ack, you surprised me!”

The angel bastard shoves his face close to mine, taking me by surprise, and I take a few steps back.

“Fucker! You startled me!”

“It looked like examinee Kim Hyun-ho was once again suspicious of something.”

“Of course it’s strange!”

I say.

“The Earth and Arena are separate worlds. It’s a world that should be impossible to touch physically, am I right?”

“You are.”

“But the entirety of our world knows well about Arena and is participating in it. And they are taking and gathering the majeong we bring from Arena to use as a high-efficiency energy, is this all possible?”

“What’s to say it isn’t.”

This bastard fellow is picking his ear with his pinky finger and responds disrespectfully.

“Won’t it go against the laws of worldly order or anything like that?”

“Nope, no.”

The baby angel dismisses with a wave of his hands.

But the more I think about it, the stranger it is.

Examinees are selected amongst the dead.

Even though you spend a week in the Arena, only the time spent sleeping passes on Earth.

That could be a consideration in order not to engulf the Earth in chaos.

But actually, examinees are restricted to secrecy. The whole world knows about Arena and examinees and have even made secret organizations and are researching it. Even though it isn’t revealed to the general public.

‘Did they intentionally induce us? Is that another purpose amongst others of the exam?’

My thoughts are to there when I’m interrupted.

“Okay, up to there.”

The baby angel taps my head.

“What?”

“Examinee Kim Hyun-ho does indeed have some deep thoughts.”

“Are my speculations correct?”

“Huh? I never said that they are correct. Just that you have deep thoughts. It’s not a compliment.”

What is that, that obscure answer.

The baby angel snaps his fingers. The exam door appears.

“Now now, hurry up and start. Or do you want to spend more time with me?”

Without a second word we all headed into the door one by one.

I enter the exam door last.

When I am surrounded by a bright light, I suddenly hear behind me the dim voice of the angel.

“I never said you were wrong either. Hehe.”

What, that bastard! Can't he just say you're right or wrong for sure!

Finally, I lose consciousness to the strong light. And the third exam begins thus.

I'm so tired of this forest.

Where we arrive is the ravine where we last stayed in the 2nd exam.

The remains of a campfire, around it the strewn bones of fish and rabbit, the traces of our presence are just as they were.

Chapter 35 - Lycanthrope (Part 1)

“First, let’s check our mission.”

“Okay, hyung.”

“Let’s.”

Joon-ho and Hye-su immediately reply and Kang Chun-seong too nods his head. Ah, this cooperation. Now that Park Go-chan isn’t here, the starting atmosphere is good.

“Board retrieval.”

- Name: Kim Hyun-ho
- Class: 5
- Karma: 0
- Mission: Escape the forest
- Time limit: 20 days

“20 days?”

It startles Hye-su.

“We have to wander this forest for that long...”

Joon-ho seems astonished as well.

Even though we are familiar with surviving due to going through the second exam, plus we have done all the necessary preparations, to live in the wild is an extremely difficult task.

Uncomfortable sleeping arrangements, chilly weather, plenty of pests, battling those difficulties for 20 days, it's no wonder we all detest this. I'm so sick of this forest too.

As the team leader, I decide to calm the group first.

“No need to worry too much. Perhaps they are just giving us plenty of time with the 20 days. If we can get out of the forest, it probably won't be 20 days.”

“That's probably right.”

Joon-ho nods his head and agrees.

“Anyway, like the research center predicted, and our mission is to escape the forest, let's move east as planned.”

I summon Sylph

-Meow.

The wind shapes itself into a slender cat, becoming Sylph. She's being cute and wrapping her tail around my neck and greets me.

"Scout the surrounding area please."

-Meow.

She nods her head and swiftly flies away.

"Okay, let's go."

I take the lead and start walking.

"Oppa, don't we have to go east?"

Asks Hye-su.

I nod my head.

"Yeah, this way is east."

"Really? How do you know the direction?"

Oh, she must not have heard of my assist skill I got.

I make a simple explanation about the ‘navigator’ assist skill I got with 100 karma.

“Wow, from now on we won’t get lost then.”

“Well yeah, but not really yet. I only know the general direction, and I have to research this skill a bit more.”

Of course, the navigator assist skill proved itself plenty useful when I went and caught the preparing-for-the-workforce Hyun-ji partying at a club.

After that, I was able to learn a lot about the navigator skill from Cha Ji-hye.

-Navigator (assist skill): gain a sixth sense to know the destination’s location and direction.

*Entry level 1: Know the general direction. (-100)

This is the extent of the entry level 1 navigator.

First, I know the direction but not the distance. I do not know if

it's a walkable distance or an un-seeable distance.

Second, in the case of finding an item or person, I have to have seen the entity before.

My younger sister, Hyun-ji, I have seen before, so I was definitely able to sense which direction she was in. The teammates gathered here together, if they were to scatter into the forests, I can find them.

But for example, let's say I have to find 'another examinee in Cheonan.' That is impossible. Because I haven't met that person yet.

By chance, even if I had run into said examinee on the street, I do not know definitively who the 'examinee in Cheonan' is so I wouldn't be able to find the person.

The same goes for a celebrity I have seen from TV or the internet. I have never met them in person so the navigator skill doesn't react.

"If you raise your skill level, you'll be able to know for sure?"

Asks Hye-su.

"I could, but Miss Cha Ji-hye said that its sufficient just to have it at entry level 1. And to use that karma on other skills instead will be better."

As we walked, I periodically summoned Sylph to scout the surroundings and thus we didn't feel very anxious.

We experienced enough from the last exam and this forest no longer feels like a foreign place. And the red apes that appeared in this vicinity is an enemy we fought plenty and we aren't scared.

Because of all that, while we moved, we chatted with each other.

It mainly revolved around my navigator skill, so it wasn't all useless talk.

“How about this?”

Joon-ho randomly picks up a small rock from the floor.

“Watch closely.”

Joon-ho extends both his fists to me.

“Guess which hand the rock is in.”

I stare intently at both of Joon-ho's fists but no particular sense comes to me.

“I don't know.”

“Aw, I guess it doesn’t work for that.”

Joon-ho shows me the rock he was holding in his right hand.

I scout with Sylph and learn that within this whole area, red apes are wandering sparingly.

‘It would be best to avoid a conflict.’

They have already lost their leader to us, a big blow. If they know we have appeared again, they will probably overreact. It is best to avoid them as much as possible and quickly get out of their territory.

A day passes without incident.

I summon Sylph multiple times to scout and we avoid any conflicts.

The most dangerous enemy we encountered today, is but a snake that fell off a tree. As soon as the snake appeared, it got its head torn off by Sylph, who happened to be summoned.

Joon-ho and Hye-su were made extremely uncomfortable by it, but following Kang Chun-seong’s opinion, we butchered it and grilled and ate it. Is it because he’s Chinese? He doesn’t not eat anything.

After dinner, we gather around the fire and talk about this and that, when suddenly Joon-ho gets a stomachache.

“Ah, why does my stomach hurt so bad?”

“Did you eat something bad?”

“The only thing that touched my lips is that snake meat, hyung.”

Joon-ho rubs his stomach and grimaces. It seems the snake meat isn't agreeing with him and is making him ill.

“Hold on.”

Hye-su takes out a small pill from the item bag.

“It's a digestant.”

“Thanks, noona.”

Joon-ho eats the digestant that Hye-su gives him.

I guess there was a digestant in the first aid items that Hye-su packed. Then again, you can get pretty sick eating in the wild.

“I am sorry.”

A rare apology from Kang Chun-seong. He thinks it's cause Joon-ho ate the snake meat because of him.

“No, it's okay, it was tasty.”

“Joon-ho, don't stand sentry tonight and just go rest up early.”

“Okay, hyung.”

Joon-ho falls asleep first, and we go to sleep after deciding the sentry order.

Thankfully, the digestant must have worked, cause Joon-ho's face in the firelight looks alright.

Like that, without any event, the first day passed.

“I'm sorry everyone, because of me.”

The next morning, Joon-ho apologizes to all of us. It seems he feels sorry for missing sentry duty due to his stomachache.

“That's okay. Is the pain gone now?”

“Yeah.”

“That’s good. Let’s eat breakfast and immediately get going.”

Hye-su and I together prepare the morning meal. I use Sylph to hunt the most manageable, a rabbit, and Hye-su gathers strawberries and a fruit that looks like a tangerine, and some greens.

“Noona, is that fruit and greens edible?”

“Yep, I learned it for sure, so don’t worry.”

Hye-su received sword training and medic care and also learned how to decipher edible fruits and vegetables.

She trained just as hard as she is weak and her efforts are already paying off.

‘Now that I think of it, we walked all day yesterday and she didn’t show signs of exhaustion.’

Compared to the last second exam, Hye-su has made greatly improved strides. She worried about being a burden going forward, it’s a relief.

We finish our meal and start moving again.

Hye-su, with the weakest physique, got the physical strength buff entry level 1, the body of a healthy adult male, and the march isn't wearing her out.

With Sylph's scouting, we avoid conflict with the red apes and walk for half a day.

It is at the point when the darkness starts to cover the vast forest.

-Meow!

Sylph suddenly appears in the middle of her scouting and makes a sharp noise.

“Is it an enemy?”

-Meow!

Sylph nods her head.

“Are they coming this way?”

This time she shakes her head.

But Sylph's demeanor is unlike her. She is completely different than when she discovered the red apes wandering in search of

food.

I think maybe, and ask.

“Is it an enemy other than red apes?”

Sylph nods her head.

“I feel like something just passed us by really quick.”

Says someone.

The others chime in agreement.

“I felt it too. It was some kind of hazy shape.”

“You guys too? I thought it was just a feeling.”

Dusk begins to settle on the forest.

Four human shadows slowly walk on.

“No sound or smell, interesting.”

“I know. How is that possible?

“It’s a creature never seen before in our territory.”

And then.

“Idiots.”

The largest shadow among them speaks up.

“Like there is a creature without scent or noise.”

The other three stop talking and pay attention.

It continues.

“It is most likely a spirit.”

“Spirit?”

“Is that true, hyung?”

To the surprised younger siblings, the one called hyung continues speaking.

“A long time ago when grandfather was alive, I heard of it once. He said there is a spirit in this world but it is not alive, but alive.”

“Grandfather said he saw a spirit?”

“A time long ago, when grandfather was banished from our clan one time, he tried to cross a green mountain range to the west.”

“A green mountain range?”

“Uh, that’s the...”

The [dongsaengs](#) are lost in thought.

(TN: What you would call a sibling or a close friend that is younger than you.)

“Everyone died but grandfather, who came here. He said he saw a spirit then.”

“Of course everyone died! It’s so lucky that grandfather was able to survive, even!”

“That’s the elves’ territory.!”

Anxiety spread to the three dongsaengs’ faces. They look at hyung and ask.

“Then perhaps, did that spirit belong to an elf?”

“If elves invade our territory, that’s a big problem!”

“We have to alert father!”

“Don’t act hastily!”

Hyung yells in a large voice. The three dongsaengs don’t say a word.

Hyung growls as he speaks.

“We have yet to verify anything, what good will it be to alert father? Do you want him to think you all cowards?”

“No, no.”

“Not that.”

“We are not cowards.”

At the mention of ‘father’, the panicking dongsaengs calm down. To them, this father entity is of special existence.

“Let’s check it out ourselves. I have heard that it is not only elves that retain spirits. Grandfather said that there is the rare human

who is friends with an elf and learns to summon spirits.”

The hyung’s words continue.

“If it is an elf, we won’t engage, and we’ll tell father. And if it is a human...We will do the same to it as we have the other humans that have stepped foot in our territory.”

“Okay.”

“You’re right.”

The dongsaengs approve.

The night sky’s moonlight comes down through the dense deciduous forest and lights the four shadows.

Their appearance as lit by the moonlight, is a bipedal beast covered in silver fur.

“Let’s go!”

The hyung leads the pack and runs, and the dongsaengs follow after him.

“Grrr!”

“Grrrrr!”

As they begin to run, they start to show their wild nature.

With resilient legs they kick the earth and support their body with their arms, running like a four legged beast.

Their eyes flow with a sparkle, with rolls of bloodthirst. They are the eyes of beasts hungry for blood.

And so the four lycanthrope brothers set out to find their enemy.

(TN: What a [lycanthrope](#) looks like.)

Chapter 36 - Lycanthrope (Part 2)

The four lycanthropes, with their silver fur, speed through the forest.

Within their clan, scores of their brothers and sisters are teeming. But even amongst them all, these four brothers have the same mother, and have a special relationship with each other.

The eldest son Helgi, born with strength and poise, was distinguished as the next leader of the clan. But Helgi was not overconfident and always held himself lower, and this was enough to earn his father's confidence.

‘Because I saw, clearly, how hyung died.’

Originally, there were five brothers born to their mother. There was a brother that was three years older than Helgi.

He was a hyung that was very strong.

It was always said that he inherited the most of his father's blood.

A story spread amongst the clan that the leader would change in a short while. It was said that father's long time rule was soon to be broken.

But he opened the lid and what did he find.

The overconfident hyung, against his mother's dissuading, challenged his father. He was engulfed with the desire to hold his father's position and his wives. He died instantly with a blow to his neck.

"I know."

Holding the hyung's smashed neck with one hand, father spoke to everyone.

"I wish that all of you possess the same ambition that rests ablaze in my own heart."

The brothers looked at their father with awe. The mothers and sisters too looked on at father with envy.

"But right now is not the time. Do not challenge me. Wait a little longer and I will show you a new world. Then, I will welcome any and all challenges."

A body bigger than anyone else.

A beautiful silver fur coat that shines in the moonlight more than anyone else's.

He smashed the strongest of challengers with one blow and so,

his father continued to reign over clan.

And Helgi realized it.

‘Father has some grand plan.’

A plan far grander than any power struggles within the clan.

Helgi decided to side with his father’s plan. Helgi, like his dead brother, desired for his father’s power and women, but deemed it unfeasible through strength.

Helgi’s decision was right.

After that, all the brothers that challenged their father lost their lives. Father defeated the challengers without a scratch to himself.

As the brothers who revealed their desires with their challenges kept dying, Helgi earned his father’s trust and climbed the ranks in the clan. As a prize, he even earned two sisters from a different mother as wives.

And then other brothers followed in Helgi’s footsteps, and began pledging allegiance to their father, but Helgi was already firmly in place as the second in command.

Helgi’s three brothers from the same mother followed their eldest brother. They followed Helgi, trying to distinguish

themselves and looking for an opportunity to earn a prize from father.

How far did they run?

They pick up the enemy's scent.

“It's this way!”

“This smell is human!”

As they learn their opponent is human, the lycanthropes grow confident.

To the brothers, an elf is a dubious opponent, but a human is merely food. They know the taste of human blood and lean meat very well.

“Don't underestimate it. It is said that there are strong ones amongst humans.”

Helgi warns them but the dongsaengs don't hear it and run even harder.

Their eagerness shines bright in their eyes, competing with each other to make the first contribution.

But then.

Tang-

A weird noise rings from far away.

Puk!

And the dongsaeng that ran ahead, his skull blows up.

Helgi and his group are completely surprised and abruptly stop.

“Wha, what?!”

“What did you just do?”

Having just lost a brother and not knowing how, the dongsaengs fall into chaos.

‘It felt like something flew by.’

Helgi stays composed and thinks.

It felt like something small flew by and then his dongsaeng’s head blew up.

He doesn't know what it is, but he is sure that it is a new weapon that the human has.

Tang-pajik!

Another brother's head blows up and Helgi is sure this time.

“Hide!”

Helgi shouts as he quickly hides behind a tree. The only dongsaeng left hides his body into the woods.

As they hide, the unknown attacks stop.

‘Every time there is a loud noise, one dies.’

The inside of Helgi's head becomes complicated.

‘Between the first and second attack, there was some time. It must not be able to consecutively shoot.’

If a rapid consecutive attack was possible, all the brothers would be dead.

‘Then...’

Helgi looks at his dongsaeng behind the trees, shaking in fear.

Helgi's eyes become sharp.

“Listen to me carefully.”

As Helgi opens his mouth, the dongsaeng looks at him.

“On one, two, three, let's jump out at the same time.”

“To fight?”

“You idiot. How would we fight against a bastard with a weapon like this? We're making a run for it.”

“Oh, okay.”

“Count. One, two...”

On the count of three the dongsaeng jumps out from behind the woods. But Helgi doesn't move a muscle and stays hidden behind the tree.

Tang-puk!

The dongsaeng's head blows up and his life is futilely lost.

‘Now!’

At last, Helgi jumps out from behind his tree. He rushes for his dead brother and takes his corpse onto his back.

Tang!

A sharp sound is heard again but whatever it is that flew by violently lodges itself into his brother's corpse, carried on his back.

Using his dead brother as a shield, Helgi keeps running. He runs desperately, so hard that his tail may fall out.

We blankly stare at Sylph, coolly sniping with the Mosin-Nagant.

Sylph is so cute to begin with but now that she's holding a rifle that's bigger than herself and shooting it, Hye-su is completely charmed by it. Cha Ji-hye was too, Sylph holding a gun is a real woman trap.

Four rounds of shooting.

And then Sylph shakes her head and hands over the Mosin-Nagant to me.

“How did it go?”

Sylph makes a number 3 with her tail.

“You lost one?”

-Meow...

With a neck like a limp weed, Sylph nods her head. I pick up Sylph and place her on my shoulder and console her.

“That’s okay, you still did great.”

We walk to where the lycanthropes lay dead.

We only saw the lycanthropes as illustrations at the research center, and seeing them in person is a bit of a shock.

With a big build that is a head taller than humans, its hard body is covered in silver fur, with long and sharp nails.

How do you think it feels to come face to face with a monster that seems like it came out of a fantasy movie? I’m completely flustered as to if this is reality or fantasy.

But the stench of blood that stings my nostrils wakes me to this reality.

“Ugh!”

Hye-su’s face grimaces at seeing the exploded head. But her stomach must have gotten stronger since last time because she doesn’t vomit.

“Uh, it really is a wolf human.”

Says Joon-ho as he carefully taps the lycanthrope corpse with his foot.

“Where did one go?”

Kang Chun-seong asks the question.

Then we realize that there are but only two corpses. Surprised at seeing lycanthropes for the first time, we hadn’t thought of it.

-Meow.

With her front paw, Sylph points ahead. It must be the direction the surviving one took off in.

‘Ah!’

I finally realize the situation.

“The remaining one must have used a corpse as a shield and run off.”

“It’s intelligent.”

Says Kang Chun-seong. I agree with his words.

From a lycanthrope’s point of view, a weapon like a gun will have been the first exposure of its kind to it. To think of using a corpse as a shield in that situation, it is a decision that would be impossible unless it was intelligent.

“Oppa, now what do we do?”

“Hm...”

I am quiet in my thoughts.

Since one got away, there is a high chance it will return with its group for revenge. They said lycanthropes are good at combat.

But the bastard that made it out alive will have fully recognized the power of the rifle. It won’t be able to just barge on us. Considering its senses are like a wolfs...

At the end of my pondering, I make a decision.

“Let’s keep going. We have to go through their territory anyway.”

“Okay.”

“Okay, hyung.”

“After suffering from the gun, they won’t be able to hastily attack us. But as it gets darker there is a high chance they may attack in the night, so for now let’s hurry and find a safe location.”

Our footsteps become faster than usual.

I use Sylph to scout and search for a safe location like a cave.

But a location doesn’t turn up and after wandering for a long while, we discover a marshy swamp. It looks like it started as a small lake and developed into a swamp.

“The day is getting dark so let’s spend the night here.”

“Will this be okay?”

Asks Hye-su with an anxious expression.

I point to the swamp and speak.

“The bastards won’t be able to cross the swamp, so we’ll back up towards it and look at the other directions.”

“But we won’t be able to run through it either.”

As Joon-ho points this out, I reply.

“Even if we run, don’t you think they’ll catch up to us quickly?”

“Ah...”

“We have to let go of the notion of making a run for it from the get go. Only think of winning the fight.”

“Yes, hyung.”

We set up a fire and arrange sentry duty, but I am nervous and cannot fall asleep. Without Sylph, we won’t know the bastards are near until they are close.

I eventually end up falling asleep and waking up from the anxiety, repeatedly.

In the midst of it, every time I awoke, I summoned Sylph to scout and fell back asleep, and not a while later, woke up again and repeated the same thing again.

I was doing so when a thought pops into my head.

‘Ah, majeong!’

They said all the organisms in Arena have majeong within their bodies. That should include lycanthropes.

I had completely forgotten.

‘How could I forget that. I could’ve have gotten money and sold it, what a waste.’

But at this point, I don’t have the intention to return to where the corpses are to collect the majeong.

‘Next time, I won’t forget, and I’ll collect it for sure.’

Atop a hill where the moonlight shined bright, a hundred and some lycanthropes are assembled.

In the middle of a round circle of the gathered swarm, one lycanthrope was on his knees.

It’s Helgi.

Beside Helgi is the corpse of the dongsaeng who had his head blown off.

Not knowing what, the men and the women gather around, and Helgi has his head held low, keeping his silence.

“What happened?”

“The Maria brothers died. They all died except for Helgi.”

“Really? By who?”

“A human.”

“A human? Really?”

“Haha, if that’s the truth, that Helgi bastard won’t have any honor to speak of.”

“You saying the brothers all suffered at the hands of a prey like humans? That Helgi, now that I see him, was he just pretending to be strong but he really isn’t that much at all?”

From here and there, come in the criticisms and ridicules. There is no way Helgi, with his sensitive lycanthrope senses, is not hearing all this.

But Helgi doesn't get up in anger and instead remains sitting quietly.

But then,

“Shh, quiet.”

“He's here.”

At the appearance of one lycanthrope, the whole group falls silent.

A beast that boasts the grandest build, walking erect.

From his shining silver fur that covers his body, there are scars printed in like medals.

He is Helgi's father and leader of the clan.

The father strides to the edge of the cliff and sits atop a boulder. Everyone respects and fears him. He is the monarch on his throne.

The father opens his mouth.

“What has happened?”

Helgi shuts his eyes and grits his teeth and answers.

“My brothers lost to a human.”

Chapter 37 - Lycanthrope (Part 3)

“Lost to a human?”

The fathers face is clouded in suspicion.

From amongst the clan, the faint sound of the giggle of men can be heard.

Helgi pays no heed to it and speaks.

“I do not know how many of them there are. We didn’t even see a face and three of them lost in an instant. I am sorry, father.”

The intermittent laughter from around, suddenly stops.

In this place there is not a single man that likes Helgi. It is because within the clan, all men compete for rank and women.

But that doesn’t mean they deny his strength.

If this Helgi returned without a chance to fight and after losing his brothers, that is not a problem to pass by, scoffing it off as incompetence.

Three of them died, but none even saw the opponent’s face? Something serious is happening here.

“You did not even see a face? That is insufficient information.”

At his father’s words, Helgi gestures to his dongsaeng’s corpse beside him.

“That is why I brought the body of my brother.”

He flips over his dongsaeng’s corpse and shows him the back.

“Something small flew faster than wind and lodged itself. The human is using a strange weapon that can target opponents from a far distance.”

“Inspect the body.”

“Yes.”

Helgi inspects his dongsaeng’s corpse. He puts his hand inside the wound in the back and fishes around. Then, something comes into Helgi’s hand.

He takes it out and shows it to his father. It is a small crunched up piece of metal.

“You say something this small flew faster than wind?”

“Yes, father.”

“It has a dangerous weapon.”

“I am not positive, but my guess is there is also a summoned spirit.”

A cold silence finds them.

An unknown weapon that slayed Helgi’s brothers in an instant.
And a summoned spirit too.

The human that stepped foot into their territory this time is not to be taken lightly.

“First, we should know who this human is and how many there are.”

“Father, I will go and find out!”

Out of the blue, one lycanthrope bursts out from the clan with confidence.

‘Jason?’

Helgi’s face becomes distorted.

Jason is the most in competition with Helgi amongst his different mothered brothers.

Seeing Helgi's return from failure in this incidence, Jason quickly volunteered himself. It's clearly a tactic to check himself on Helgi.

“Do so.”

Father doesn't seem to really care who takes this job.

“Thank you! I will!”

Jason departs gleefully. The brothers from Jason's mother follow behind him.

‘This isn't good.’

Helgi's expression becomes shadowed.

In the clan his father reigns over, lycanthropes normally center on a maternal line and form factions.

Up to now, Helgi and his brothers who are from their fathers first wife, Maria, have been holding power, but with this incident, everyone but Helgi has died.

On top of it all, there are seven brothers from Hera, the third wife.

If they succeed in this task too, they may use this to have Jason rise to the second in command.

Of course, personal strength is more important than factions, but even compared to Helgi, Jason isn't weak. If they were to fight, Helgi would have to prepare for possible death for this rival.

‘But nothing is definite yet. Jason is impatient so he may spoil the job.’

They will definitely succeed in at least the scouting. They just have to approach to a visible range.

But after succeeding in the scouting, what if Jason gets greedy and attacks the humans?

The picture of the human counterattacking and inflicting large damage draws itself naturally.

For the clan as a whole, losing members is not a good thing, but for Helgi, the fall of his rival is the best outcome.

‘I guess I should hope that this Jason bastard dies.’

Helgi anticipates Jason's reckless bravado.

“Haha, did you say Helgi’s face scrunch up?”

“It looked like he was chewing shit.”

Jason’s brothers snort.

“Losing to a human and returning, he should know he’s embarrassed. Humph, he strutted enough all that time and now Helgi’s limit is reached.”

Jason slandered Helgi plenty and his brothers agreed.

Father’s rule of the clan was already going on 26 years.

From their father’s rule, the silver clan’s long history saw a lot of change.

The most marked change was the clan’s growth.

In the history of the clan, there was never a lycanthrope as strong as father. No one could challenge father.

Not only that, but father forbid unnecessary rank struggles within the clan.

Challenges and rank fights didn't occur so men's death rates greatly declined and due to that, the clan's numbers increased.

Father also found a way to procure food without hunting. That was a remarkable innovation. Without difficultly wandering the terrain and hunting, they were able to easily obtain food.

As food became plentiful, the clan became ever prosperous. The clan that was no more than 20 members is now stronger than 100.

At first there was a lot of dissatisfaction at father's strange policies but now, everyone praises him. They say he brought prosperity to the Silver clan.

But internal dissent still exists.

And brother Jason is the prime example.

'A lycanthrope is always about strength! Rank must be decided with strength. Kissing father's ass and raising rank, that's wrong!'

Jason had a lot of pity for Helgi.

He never thought that his strength fell behind that of Helgi.

But Helgi's quick wit and intelligence enabled him to cleanly carry out his father's commands, and thick headed Jason couldn't

do so. Because of this, the position of the clan had no choice but to follow Helgi.

Up until a little while ago.

‘Now is the chance.’

Father’s governing style is wrong.

The clan’s numbers have grown but the men have lost courage and become weak.

Since not having to hunt to live, their senses have diminished, leading to losing to the likes of a human.

Jason’s thoughts are like this.

‘We have to return to the way it was before. I will do that.’

He, of course, has no intention of challenging father. Because he’s too strong.

But he just needs to squash his strongest rival, Helgi.

Even monstrous father will age in due time! If he can quash Helgi, the next leader is him.

“Let’s obliterate the humans who dared step foot into our land.”

“What?”

“You want to obliterate them?”

The brothers are alarmed at Jason’s outburst.

“Jason, our order was to scout. Father didn’t say for us to fight.”

“Yeah.”

“And these are dangerous humans who have a strange weapon. What if we hastily attack and in reverse, we get attacked?”

“Even the Helgi brothers suffered.”

“Helgi brothers what?”

As Jason suddenly starts to growl, the brothers are started. Jason is flaming angry.

“You saying because the Helgi brothers couldn’t do it that we won’t be able to?!”

“No, no, what I was saying...”

“You coward!”

“Kek...! Kek...!”

Jason grips and twists a brother’s neck.

“Listen well! We will hunt all the human bastards that brutally murdered Helgi’s brothers. When we return after such a huge success, father, who trusted in the kinds of Helgi, will change his mind a bit, I’m sure. He will realize that in turn for our clan’s prosperity, we have become too weak!”

“Kek...! Ah, okay...!”

Jason flings his brother down. Then he walks ahead briskly.

“Let’s go. First we have to sniff out the scent of where the humans are.”

‘This won’t do.’

I can barely sleep due to the anxiety so I decide to take a countermeasure.

“Let’s switch night and day.”

I report to the teammates.

Everyone is puzzled so I continue with an explanation.

“Lycanthropes are nocturnal so there’s a high chance they will attack at night. In addition to that, night is when we are sleeping and our field of vision is restricted.”

“You are saying we should sleep in the day.”

I nod at Kang Chun-seong’s words.

“Yes, if we sleep in the brightest parts of the day, it will be more beneficial to the sentry than at night. And in the darkness of night we can frequently summon Sylph and move.”

“That’s a good idea.”

“I agree too.”

Hye-su and Joon-ho agree.

Kang Chun-seong nods his head and agrees to it.

We have a simple breakfast and move, and when the sun hits

about midday, we decide to sleep.

We sleep under our cloaks under the shade of a tree and because none of us slept well from the anxiety, we easily fall asleep even in the middle of the day.

There is no need to build a fire so its two birds with one stone. We now won't draw the lycanthropes to us by firelight either.

But as the sun descends, a difficult march begins. We have to endure the discomfort of limited vision, and keep moving.

After some deliberating, I set Kang Chun-seong up front. With a physical strength buff intermediate level 1 and aura control entry level 5, Kang Chun-seong has the best senses and, even at night, maneuvers well using all five senses.

After that, Joon-ho and Hye-su follow, and I take position at the end.

Kang Chun-seong alerted us to every rock or protruding branch and fulfilled his role well.

I frequently summoned Sylph to scout the surrounding 1.2 km.

‘There’s no way we just pass like this. They’ll definitely come back for revenge.’

They are bound not to be so weak as to not attack due to a fear of the gun. Would an exam be this easy?

‘Last night, there was no attack from the enemy. It is proof that they are vigilant. They are probably thinking of being prudent.’

Precisely, they are being cautious about the power of the gun I carry. They won’t have ever seen a weapon like this, so they must be thoroughly alarmed.

If so, there won’t be an imminent large scale attack.

‘For now, they must be spying.’

A wolf is a very intelligent animal, and more so, they said the lycanthrope has an intelligence equal to humans.

For now, they will send a few to spy on us.

They will try to discover how many of us there are, and the identity of the strange long distance weapon.

Long distance weapon, they’ll even want to know the Mosin-Nagant’s shooting range. An attack will follow after they thoroughly know those things.

If so, we cannot give them that information easily.

We have to interrupt and disturb their spying.

‘Okay.’

I think up a trap.

“Sylph.”

-Meow?

“Is there a strong or peculiar smelling plant or fruit near to us that can hide our body order/scent?”

-Meow!

Sylph nods her head.

“Bring it to me please.”

Sylph flits away, flying.

Perhaps 5 minutes have passed?

Sylph comes back with a bunch of something that looks like mug wort. I bring it close to my nose and sniff and it wafts a pungent smell.

‘This will work.’

I move to execute my plan.

“Sylph, will you erase our scent for 20 minutes? Make it so our scent isn’t where we passed by.”

-Meow.

Sylph nods in understanding.

Then I share with the group the plant that Sylph brought.

“In 20 minutes, plan to smoosh this and rub it into your clothes.”

“What are you planning?”

At Hye-su’s question, I answer.

“The bastards will probably be tracking us through scent. They will get how many of us there are and at what distance by using their smell.”

“You want to erase our scent to distract them?”

Asks Joon-ho.

“It is impossible to give them the slip. But if our scent disappears, the bastards might feel flustered.”

I grin and continue speaking.

“Since it will be hard to tell with their smell, they will get close to tell with their eyes. Let’s catch them all then.”

Chapter 38 - The Silver Village (Part 1)

The Jason brothers discovered the traces of the humans' camp at the marshy swamp.

It's a place they had lingered at for quite a while and the scent they left behind was quite strong.

“There's four.”

“I think one is a female.”

“Seeing as how the scent is still strong, they camped here last night.”

The brothers stick their noses here and there and imprint the scent of their prey in their minds. Now that they know the scent, the hunt is as good as half over.

Jason looked around his surroundings and looked to the direction where were are footsteps.

“They are moving west.”

“Then they are going entirely straight through our clan's domain?”

“What are these bastards doing?”

“Seriously, where did they come from?”

The brothers tilt their heads.

The silver clan thoroughly guards their territory. Not even a mouse could enter without them knowing about it.

What’s more, humans, with their lacking olfactory and auditory senses, don’t have the skill to evade the silver clans’ surveillance.

But from the center of the forest, unidentified humans just appeared out of nowhere.

Where did these humans come from?

“They most definitely did not enter through our territory. Then did they perhaps enter the forest by cutting through the troll’s territory?”

Jason recalled the trolls that reside in the northern part of the forest, and thought probably not.

Trolls are strong and atrocious. Even the silver clan that had pushed out the red apes and dominated the western part of the forest, tended to avoid conflict with the trolls.

“If they really crossed through the troll domain, they are not

some ordinary humans.”

“I think we have to be careful of these ones.”

“Yeah, the Helgi brothers won’t have lost just to anything.”

At the brothers’ mention of the Helgi brothers, Jason started to get annoyed.

“Let’s go.”

“...?”

“Even so, they are humans. Once it is night, humans are no different than being blind.”

“Yeah.”

“That’s true.”

The Jason brothers started to chase the groups traces.

They chased, following the footsteps, but the most important thing is the scent that was left at every spot they pass.

Using how much scent was left, they determined how long ago they were there. This way, they could tell just now fast their

hunting targets were moving.

The Jason brothers matched their speed to the human groups and slowly started to catch up.

There was no need to rush.

While the sun is up, it is better to keep a certain distance. Since the humans have a strange long distance weapon.

They can catch up at night when the humans are asleep. Jason was planning on eliminating all the humans at that time.

The Jason brothers leisurely tracked the humans.

It's the silver clan's territory anyway.

It's a chase happening on their front lawn, so the Jason brothers could just close their eyes and still pursue them. They could clearly guess the outcome of the human group.

But...

“Huh?”

Amongst the brothers, one of them makes a confused noise.

The other brothers too.

Confusion brushes by on Jason's face too.

'The scent is gone?'

"The bastards' scent is suddenly gone!"

"How can this happen?"

"It doesn't make sense that the smell just stops."

The brothers are flustered at this occurrence that has never happened before. Jason too is flustered but he reassured his brothers.

"The footsteps are clearly present. I don't know what trick they played but for now, let's chase."

"Think it'll be okay?"

"Something feels wrong."

The brothers look nervous.

When chasing prey, relying heavily on smell is a characteristic of the lycanthrope, and chasing prey whose scent has suddenly

disappeared, is uncomfortable.

Jason growls.

“Then? You want to just turn back? Should we tell father we just returned because we got scared the scent disappeared?!”

“No, no.”

“I didn’t mean it like that.”

The brothers are intimidated and follow Jason.

For a while, the situation continued where they tracked the scent, but suddenly the scent disappeared and they were forced to track the human group by looking at their footsteps.

But as 20 minutes pass, a strange smell wafts from the tracks of the human group.

“This is the smell of a weed.”

“These humans are playing a strange trick.”

This time, a pungent smell wafts everywhere to the point that they cannot smell the human group’s scent.

Just what secret design are the humans planning, the Jason brothers' confusion grows bigger.

But there is no doubt that this weed smell is a trace left by the human group.

The Jason brothers have no choice but to use the footprints and weed smell to continue tracking.

They continue tracking like this for a while.

The day brightens and the sun is high and center.

The Jason brothers halt tracking for a moment.

It is because from not far off, the smell of the weed hangs in the air.

It means the human group has stopped, not far away.

“Hyung, what should we do?”

“I think the humans have stopped.”

“They must be eating or something.”

“Damn, that pungent weed smell is all the way over here.”

The brothers ramble on and exchange opinions.

Judging from the weed smell, there is no doubt that the human group is resting not far from here.

It's still broad daylight.

They could be found out if they approach the humans any closer in such bright light.

"The bastards have that strange weapon that killed Helgi's brothers. Shouldn't we wait to approach until night when they will be asleep?"

One brother offers up a suggestion.

Jason agrees that the suggestion is a good idea.

"Okay. We'll wait and rest here until the bastards move."

"Okay."

"I'll go hunt for something to eat."

"Let's go together."

The brothers who had been tracking since dawn without so much as a morsel to eat all day, scattered in search of food.

The lycanthrope brothers, being the evolved hunters that they are, quickly catch an elk.

Jason approaches the elk his brothers caught and with one hand, crushes its neck.

Kwaduduk!

With a terrifying noise, the elk is killed.

Jason ferociously bites into the elk's neck and drinks the fresh blood that explodes from it.

The brothers swallow in hunger and await their turns.

As seven big lycanthropes dive in, it only takes a few moments before the elk is reduced to nothing but bones.

They finish their meal and their bellies are full and the Jason brothers return their attentions to the human group.

“The smell is just as it was.”

“They are still close. They still haven't moved.”

“Have they still not finished eating?”

The strong weed smell continues to hang in the air.

After some consideration, the Jason brothers decide to wait it out a little longer.

As long as the humans are in their territory, they may as well be in the palm of their hands. That’s how they thought.

But time passed and the weed smell didn’t disappear at all, the Jason brothers begin to question.

“Why aren’t they moving?”

“The humans’ movements is strange.”

“That they still aren’t moving, aren’t they being too laid back about this? Do they not know whose territory they are in?”

Have they finished their meal and are casually taking a nap?

Have they not caught on at all that they are being chased?

The main questions make the Jason brothers feel confused.

‘This won’t do.’

Jason picks the youngest out of his brothers.

“You go look for yourself.”

“What? Me?”

The youngest brother’s face became clearly distorted.

“You afraid?”

Asks Jason with a threatening expression.

The youngest brother’s expression looks like he just ate shit.

He doesn’t want to be treated as a pussy but with Jason strong-arming him, he doesn’t have much of a choice.

“Okay. I’ll go, jeez.”

The youngest mumbles as he goes.

The youngest follows the humans’ footsteps for about an hour and pants as he returns.

“What happened?”

At Jason’s question, the youngest quickly shouts.

“We’ve been had!”

“What?”

“Come see for yourself!”

The Jason brothers go with their youngest to the scene.

The second he saw the scene, Jason felt preposterous. And then despondent...

And lastly, a rising rage he cannot control.

“These insect-like bastards!”

At the scene, there is no evidence to suggest that the humans had rested there.

Just a bunch of discarded weeds that had been crushed with rocks to spread its putrid smell.

Because of that weed smell, the Jason brothers had thought that the humans had stopped here and wasted a lot of time.

‘They tricked us into waiting here and moved far away.’

Jason concludes that the human definitely used trickery and then ran far away.

“Let’s hurry. We have to catch up to them by nightfall.”

“Okay!”

The Jason brothers hurry and begin to race.

Having been tricked like idiots by humans that are mere prey, their pride was deeply hurt and the brothers raced with blinders on.

We came to learn around lunchtime, that there were seven lycanthropes on our tail.

In their minds, they thought they were keeping the distance as to not get caught, but they were found by Sylph and her wide scouting range.

I put my plan into action.

The first step was to discard about half of the weeds we had been holding onto.

According to my plan, the lycanthropes weren't able to easily approach due to the strong stench of the weed.

Using that time, we moved far away and slept.

Knowing that the bastards would be tricked by the weed smell and not be chasing us, we were able to sleep at ease and rest.

-Meow!

At the last sentry, Sylph finished her scouting and returned.

With her front paw, Sylph pointed behind her. It seems the bastards have now realized they were tricked and are chasing again. I'm sure they're pissed?

I quickly wake Joon-ho, Hye-su, and Kang Chun-seong.

"Wake up. We have to go now."

"Hyung, what are you going to do now?"

"We will see a winner tonight."

Due to the weed smell disturbing their olfactory senses, the lycanthropes have lost their sense of distance.

Having been tricked by me, they will be in all the more of a hurry.

Tonight, the bastards will daringly approach us.

We have to set up a trap and wait, then kill them all.

“I’ll be bait.”

The one who volunteered himself is none other than Kang Chun-seong.

“There is no need for that. We can lure them with the clothes that have our scent and the weed scent on them.”

“That may be for their sense of smell, but how will you trick their hearing? Our opponent is not a wolf, but intelligent.”

“Ah...”

Kang Chun-seong is right.

If the lycanthropes get close but don’t hear any sound, they will feel that something is off. They have already been tricked once so

now they will be more vigilant.

“Will you be alright?”

“It won’t be a problem. I wanted to fight them to see just how strong they are. I can also see how strong I have become.”

Indeed, Kang Chun-seong has guts like no other.

He didn’t even get nervous confronting a 19th turn veteran and even let down some teaching on the man.

“Then, thank you. You just have to catch them.”

How far did we walk.

Evening passed and the sky began to grow dark.

We kept walking and as the sun completely disappeared, we moved on with the plan.

Including our capes, we took our garments with our body odors on them and gather them in one place. Kang Chun-seong pretended to be asleep on top of the garments.

In our battle suits and boots, we wait not far off.

“Weapon.”

The Mosin-Nagant appears, falling into my right hand.

“Here, oppa.”

Hye-su takes out 7.62 mm bullets from her bag.

I load the Mosin-Nagant and get everything ready.

Now all there is left to do, is wait for the bastards to come.

Chapter 39 - The Silver Village (Part 2)

“I can smell them.”

Says one of the brothers as he sniffs the air.

Jason too concentrates on his sense of smell and nods.

“Definitely. The putrid weed smell is mixed in but a vague human smell is there.”

Jason grinds his teeth.

“Let’s go. And kill them all.”

“We should still be careful.”

“They have that strange weapon.”

“I already know!”

The Jason brothers begin to carefully approach the place where the humans have stalled.

They quiet their breaths and approach without a sound.

As they get closer, the body odor of the humans gets stronger.

They finally succeed in getting close enough to the humans to check them out with their eyes.

One male human is visible.

Perhaps he is on sentry duty because he is sitting in place. The others are hard to see but it looks like they are laying down, asleep.

The brothers look to Jason. They're looking as if to ask, what now.

‘There is only one that is awake.’

The male human that is awake is not holding on to any weapon.

At that level, it is a good chance to just fight. Actually, it would be an overwhelming victory.

This is the golden opportunity to kill all the humans that Helgi couldn't do anything about and ran from. Jason is not one to lose on such an opportunity.

‘How dare they tricked me! Mere humans!’

Jason raises his claws sharply.

The brothers follow suit and change into fighting stance. With a fight imminent, a wild bloodthirst begins to ebb.

“Grrr!”

Finally, Jason attacks.

The first to target is of course, the awake sentry, the visible human male.

He goes in right away and slashes around his claws. It would only be a moment to slit one male humans throat.

But the male human, as if he had been waiting, moves his body to the right, avoiding the attack. All the more, as the human escapes by rolling on the ground, he kicks Jason’s leg and makes him lose his balance.

Puk!

“Kuk!”

At an unexpected counterattack, the careless Jason stumbles.

The brothers that came out at the same time and attacked, had no effect in startling the man.

‘Something is wrong!’

An uneasy feeling passes Jason’s mind. Then...

Tang!

“Shoot!”

As I give my order, Sylph pulls the trigger.

Tang!

At the same time a spark appears at the end of the Mosin-Nagant, a ‘Ggaeng!’ sounding scream spreads.

Click!

Sylph pulls the bolt back and forth and gets rid of the cartridge. Then she pulls the trigger, all of this was done incredibly swiftly.

Tang-puk!

Every time the sound of the shot goes off, a lycanthrope falls.

Click, tang!

“Khung!”

Click, tang!

“Ggaeng!”

Sylph is like a machine, sending continuous shots with repetitive motions.

If I had been the one holding this gun, I would not be this swift.

The night is dark so only vague silhouettes can be seen, but I can tell the lycanthropes are incredibly flustered.

“Run away!”

It's the first time hearing a lycanthropes voice.

I'm shocked.

‘They really talk like humans!’

I'm shocked that they speak like humans with the face of an

animal, and I'm shocked again that we can understand them.

It's a language I hear for the first time, yet I am able to understand it.

“Hyung, the bastards are running away!”

At Joon-ho's yell, I get my head together.

Having all been shot dead in mere moments, there are only three lycanthropes left, and they begin to run away.

As they do so, Kang Chun-seong, who had been only defending amongst the center of lycanthropes, moves deliberately.

He deftly lands a low kick to a lycanthrope, toppling it.

“Krrrrng!”

The fallen lycanthrope yells out as he aimlessly flails his claws about in resistance.

Kang Chun-seong completely avoids the fierce attack, using the opening to precisely land a slap.

Puk!

“Kuhung!”

With a critical blow to the chest, the lycanthrope lets out a pained moan. Shocked at his pain, the lycanthrope lets out a sound like a beast and haphazardly slashes with his claws. It looks like it will only take a second to turn Kang Chun-seong into rags.

But Kang Chun-seong is cool-headed.

He doesn't back off but stands firm. He smoothly swishes both arms and turns the lycanthrope resistance into nothing.

He then digs in again and lands another blow to the chest!

Bbuk!

“Kuhung!”

Without restraint he continues to pound.

With screams, the lycanthrope begins to vomit blood.

‘Good. Now there's only two left.’

I hand over a five bullet clip to Sylph and make an order.

“Sylph, chase them down and shoot them all.”

-Meow!

Sylph holds the Mosin-Nagant and flies away like the wind.

Jason is stricken in fear.

He can't understand it.

Tang, every time that piercing noise spread out, a brother's head blew up.

He has never seen the respectable lycanthropes of the silver clan die in such futility.

'It was real! This is why Helgi had no choice but to flee!'

To think that he too might have died in such futility, a terror sweeps over him.

Jason flees.

There is only one brother left.

Then...

Tang-

Once again the resounding hair-ringing sound.

Jason doesn't look back, and runs. He keeps running, panting, and he realized that no one was around him.

The younger sibling that he was fleeing with was not there.

The only one left was Jason.

'I want to live! I have to live!'

A million thoughts pass through his head. All the desires he sought in life, all became useless.

Jason realizes the sweetest desire is just the hope of survival.

He should have realized the danger after seeing the Helgi brothers' defeat. He shouldn't have been careless because humans are like mere prey.

He fell for a transparent trick and was completely had and because of it, in his rage, he rushed into the situation and it was a mistake. He shouldn't have done so.

But now, the time to regret had already passed.

Taang!

A dead sound and shock is felt in his head, and with it, Jason's vision went pitch dark like the depths of hell.

Bajjik!

Kang Chun-seong lands a final blow to the lycanthrope's head.

With the terrifying sound of a skull getting crushed, the lycanthrope fell over like a puppet with its strings cut.

At the same time, Sylph returned. With two cute front paws, holding the Mosin-Nagant that is much larger than herself, she stares at me with round eyes. It's as if her expression is asking me if she did well.

"You did good, Sylph."

I pet Sylph's head. Sylph rubs her head in my palm and licks it.

The fight is over and I start off by gathering the lycanthrope

corpses into one spot.

“Let’s look for majeong.”

At my words, Joon-ho and Hye-su make a shocked expression.

“That, um, we have to search the bodies, right?”

At Joon-ho’s question, I nod my head.

“I think so.”

“Ugh...”

Joon-ho can’t fathom it.

That’s completely understandable. Even though we have been made examinees and gotten used to rough things, we haven’t gotten so used to it to dig through corpses.

Contrarily, Hye-su speaks up.

“Oppa, I’ll do it.”

“You?”

“Yeah, leave it to me.”

Hye-su summons her sword.

Then she approaches the lycanthrope corpses.

Shot by a gun so their heads so that their heads have exploded, the image of their dead bodies is extremely grotesque. Hye-su summons up her courage and stabs a lycanthrope with her sword.

Pook!

Joon-ho, who was watching, flinches.

With a shaking hand, Hye-su makes an accurate incision along the lycanthrope's abdomen.

And into the incised space where blood is spilling out, she puts in her hand.

Seeing this, I can feel it. How hard Hye-su is working to become stronger. Volunteering herself for nasty work is proof of that.

“Hyung, I'll do it too. Weapon!”

Joon-ho too summons his javelin and starts to dissect another lycanthrope.

“Oppa, I found it!”

Hye-su finds it first, and shows me a round marble looking thing, wet in blood.

A round marble with a yellow color.

This is the majeong they said that all living things in Arena carry within their bodies.

Cha Ji-hye had shown us a sample of majeong in the research center, and this one is a bit smaller than that sample, but I have no doubt about it.

“I found it too, Hyung! It was near its belly button.”

Joon-ho too shows me the majeong he has found.

“Okay, now leave it to me.”

I use Sylph.

Sylph uses the knife wind to simply extract the majeong.

We gather seven majeong and decide to store it in Hye-su’s item bag. There isn’t sufficient space so I take out the bullets and shove

them into my pockets.

“Hyung, if we sell these to the research center, how much do you think we’ll get for them?”

“I don’t know. Anyway, let’s move. We have to hurry. Other lycanthropes will have heard the shooting sounds.”

“Okay.”

We being walking again.

In the middle of Gangnam, Seoul, there is a towering building.

This skyscraper has two words, Jin Seong, largely written into it, and this building is headquarters for this Jin Seong Group.

At its top floor, an aged man, in his early 70’s, is sitting and looking down at the city view from out his window.

He looks down at the city buildings that appear tiny like toys, and this elderly man’s gaze is a look of lonely remorse.

“Chairman.”

A middle-aged man's voice can be heard from behind, calling the elderly man.

Chairman of The Jin Seong Group, born as the son of a poor farmer who holds the Republic of Korea's biggest wealth and honor, Chairman Park Jin-Seong, turns around.

Chairman Park Jin-Seong asks.

“Have you found out about it?”

“Yes, through a personal connection within the research center, I have found it.”

“Show it to me.”

The middle aged man with a thin and sharp impression, spreads out a stack of photos onto the desk.

The background is an army heliport.

It's a photo of four young men and women getting into a helicopter.

It was taken secretly with a poor camera on a smartphone by a troop affiliated executive.

There are photos of the four peoples' faces precisely focused in.

The middle-aged man then proceeds to show the files with their profiles.

“They are newly recruited examinees at the research center, known as the Kim Hyun-ho team.”

“Which one is Kim Hyun-ho?”

“This young man.”

The middle-aged man presents the photo of Kim Hyun-ho closer to Chairman Park Jin-seong.

“This fellow is the leader?”

“Yes.”

“What kind of lad is he?”

“They say he is composed and a good decision maker. More so, he has a very special main skill.”

“What kind?”

“I do not know. I said I could offer more money but the source

refused, saying it's impossible to say more."

"And the others?"

"This examinee, Kang Chun-seong, is worth noting."

He presents the photo of Kang Chun-seong and continues his explanation.

"His skills are average, but he is extremely capable, a martial artist from China. I was told he is on his 3rd turn but has the skills to surpass a 6th turn examinee."

"Huh, is that so?"

"Yes, it doesn't seem to be an exaggeration."

"Hm..."

Chairman Park Jin-seong looks at the photo of Kang Chun-seong, and then looks again at the photo of Kim Hyun-ho.

"This fellow, Kim Hyun-ho, what did he originally do?"

"Age is 29. After graduating college, he didn't have a particular job record, and was in the middle of preparing for the civil servant exam when he suddenly quit it all and moved back to where his

family lives in Cheonan.”

“Tsk tsk, how is it he never got to live a proper life before dying and suffering such hardships as this.”

Chairman Park Jin-seong clicks his tongue, as if to portray his compassion, as he stares at the photo.

It is a plain face, but warm. Like his first son’s young days.

Chapter 40 - The Silver Village (Part 3)

“How did it go?”

Asked the father.

Helgi is out of breath from having run so feverishly, and he catches his breath as he replies.

“Everyone was dead, father.”

At those words, the gathered lycanthropes become largely agitated all together.

“Aaaak! NOOO!”

One female lycanthrope collapsed to the floor and screamed. She was the mother of the Jason brothers, the third wife, Hera.

At the news that all seven sons, and even Jason, whom she had such high expectations for, had died, Hera became completely shocked and broke down crying.

“It’s a lie! What about Jason? Jason is dead too? Did you see?”

“I saw Jason’s corpse. It looked like he was hit in the head by the human’s weapon and died from it.”

Helgi replies coolly. At those words, Hera grabbed her head and wailed.

Then.

“Shut up.”

The father’s low voice spreads out.

Hera’s cries suddenly stop. With a frightened face, she looked at her husband.

“You can birth more sons. You are distracting me, so go.”

“Hu hu huk.” (sobbing noises)

Hera sorrowfully wept as she left the crowd and disappeared to a quiet place.

The father looked at Helgi again.

“Where have the bastards gone?”

“They made to the west. If they keep going this way, about tomorrow, they will arrive at the human village.”

“You mean that village.”

Father shuts his eyes for a moment.

He ponders on how to eradicate these impudent humans who had killed ten of his sons.

Then he speaks.

“We will proceed as usual”

“As usual?”

Helgi asks again. Father nods his head.

“Let them go to that village.”

We walk all night and without knowing, the day begins to brighten.

“Hyung, look over there!”

Suddenly, Joon-ho points ahead and yells. A dense fog has settled in and it is hard to make out what is ahead.

But at Joon-ho's words I stare intently and indeed, something strange can be seen.

I don't believe my eyes.

"A village?"

Yes.

A village where people are living. There is, of course, slash and burn farming, and even a farm with gathered cows and pigs can be seen.

I wouldn't have thought that in this forest inhabited by lycanthropes, a village with people could be found.

"We're alive now!"

"People are living here, so we must be out of the forest now!"

Joon-ho and Hye-su are so happy they almost leap for joy.

But I can't shake off a suspicious feeling.

"This place is so close to the lycanthrope territory and there is a village with people? Something is off."

“Listen here, oppa. The village wall is extremely high. Couldn’t that be to stop the lycanthropes?”

As Hye-su said, the village is built with a wooden fence rampart.

“... well, let’s see. It might not be an average village, it could be a hideout for bandits, so be especially careful.”

“Yes.”

“Got it.”

We cannot look at the world of Arena as the same as our 21st century world.

From what we have heard, Arena’s human society is far lagging from our present world. Who’s to know that the village people as a whole won’t rob us entirely?

We approach the village carefully.

The village is enveloped completely by a wooden fence, but the main entrance to its inside is about halfway open.

Perhaps because it is still early dawn, I don’t see any people.

But I decide to be thorough.

“Sylph.”

-Meow?

Sylph appears in midair and sits softly atop my head.

“Check out the inside of the village.”

-Meow!

Sylph becomes wind and enters the village.

Sylph returns quickly from the village and I ask her a question.

“Are people living there?”

-Meow.

Sylph nods her head.

“How many?”

Sylph draws a number 234 into the ground.

A population of 200 makes it a small village, but considering the village is situated in such a dangerous forest is impressive.

“Is everyone asleep?”

This time, she draws a number 28. It means 28 people are awake.

“I’ll lead the way.”

Kang Chun-seong volunteers.

“Please, thank you.”

Kang Chun-seong stood in front and headed inside the village. We tag along behind him.

The atmosphere inside the village is ordinary.

There are wooden homes densely packed.

When we walked through the entrance, the first thing that catches my eye is a vacant lot that looks like a square.

In the center of the space is a well, and a woman drawing water from the well stares at us wide-eyed.

“Who, who are you?”

Asks the woman.

It’s the same speech as the dead lycanthropes from last night. It sounds similar to Russian, and this time too, I am able to understand it.

“Hyung, you understood her too?”

At Joon-ho’s question, I nod my head.

“I think it is because we are examinees.”

Hye-su is correct.

For smooth progress, it must be because we have been given the ability to understand the Arena’s languages. Otherwise, this makes no sense at all.

“Um, well...”

The lady with a frightened face, asks us again.

I step forward and reply.

“Hello.”

Surprisingly, it isn't Korean that comes out of my mouth, but the same language as the woman. The other teammates look surprised too.

“Who are you people?”

“We are travelers. We took the wrong road and wandered the forest when we found this village.”

“Travelers? Of this forest?”

“Yes.”

The woman looks like she can't believe it.

Then again, it is hard to believe we are travelers that wandered through a forest full of red apes and lycanthropes.

I paraphrase.

“Yes, while we were wandering we were attacked by lycanthropes and had quite a hard time.”

As I say so, I carefully observe the woman's reaction.

“Ly-lycanthropes?”

I thoroughly watch the woman who has a sensitive reaction to the word 'lycanthrope.'

'I think she's afraid of lycanthropes. Should I up it?'

I speak.

"Ten of them attacked us at once so we eliminated them all. We're pretty strong."

The woman is completely surprised and I continue.

"Could we meet with the leader of this village? We would like to get permission to dwell here for a couple days. The lycanthropes fear us so you do not have to worry about them chasing us and attacking here."

At my words, the woman looks even more scared.

"Um, please hold on a moment. I will bring you the village chief."

The woman hastily runs off.

"Hyung, can we really bullshit our way here?"

Asks Joon-ho.

I shrug my shoulders.

“I did just to see how she’d react.”

“And?”

Asks Hye-su.

“... it’s a bit strange.”

“Huh?”

“This village is a little weird. There is more than one suspicious thing here and there.”

“Explain that.”

Says Kang Chun-seong.

I reply.

“It’s strange enough that a village is just plopped right in a lycanthrope infested forest, but the main entrance is open and no one is guarding.”

“Ah...!”

“You’re right.”

Then Joon-ho and Hye-su and Kang Chun-seong look around the village and realize too, the oddity.

“You saw that woman’s reaction, right? When I said we killed ten lycanthropes and that the bastards are scared of us, oddly enough, she became even more frightened.”

“Maybe the lycanthropes changed into village people? They told us they can transform into humans.”

Hye-so offers a possible explanation. I shake my head.

“Sylph said people are living here. That’s right, right Sylph?”

-Meow.

Sylph wraps her tail around my neck and nods her head.

“Are you sure they are humans and not transformed from lycanthropes?”

Asks Hye-su.

Sylph nods her head.

If Sylph is this sure, there is no doubt.

Moreover, in this village are fields and ranches. It's hard to imagine lycanthropes farm and ranch.

A while later, some ten village men appear around us.

“Are you guys the travelers?”

Asked a white-bearded old man with a cane.

I answer.

“Yes, we are.”

“I am this village's chief, Lebil.”

Lebil? What a strange name. Is this a name that is common in the Arena world?

“We are travelers that just travel here and there. We wish to rest here for just one day, will you grant us permission?”

“You say you fought lycanthropes?”

“Yes, things like those aren’t much.”

“Hoho, impressive indeed. I say, our village has been greatly bothered by those things. Fellows as strong as you are always welcome.”

“Thank you.”

“There is an empty house so it will not be in inconvenience for you to stay a few days. I will escort you, follow me.”

“Yes.”

“Now now, leave it to me and go back to your business.”

The chief dispersed the ten or so men that came out with him.

The men scatter, and we follow chief Lebil and walk through the village.

“Isn’t it strange?”

The chief asked randomly.

“What do you mean?”

“Isn’t it strange that a village is located here?”

“Oh, yes, I thought it strange indeed. That a village is in such a dangerous forest.”

“Hahaha, yes, the beasts and monsters from the village are dangerous. But do you know what is scarier?”

“I don’t know.”

“Taxes.”

The chief lets out a sigh and continues speaking.

“There is nothing as scary as a murderous tax. Lycanthropes are better than a cruel (feudal) lord. All the people in this village are people that ran away and hid from the lord’s tyranny.”

“You must have all suffered greatly.”

“Un-conveyable with words. Harvesting with slash-and-burn farming, raising pigs and cattle, fighting with lycanthropes, our struggles are endless.”

‘That last part is a lie.’

At the end of my deciphering, I make that conclusion.

I believe it is true that this village was made from people fleeing tyranny.

But going head to head and fighting with lycanthropes seems doubtful.

I had noted the men that had appeared with the chief earlier, and not a single one was properly weaponized.

‘I will wait and see.’

I have to find out what this elderly chief Lebil is planning.

I think that they have a certain relationship with the lycanthropes.

I have to find out this village’s identity and why they are lying.

“Okay, this is it. It’s decent, eh?”

The chief shows us a crude building built of wood plants. Well, it is better than sleeping on the floor.

“We thank you for your goodwill.”

I express my gratitude to the chief one more time.

“If there is anything you need, please let me know.”

The chief smiled pleasantly and left.

We are left to ourselves and Hye-su furrows her brows and speaks.

“Oppa, do you think it will be okay to stay here? Like you said, this village feels odd.”

“After what you said, hyung, I’ve been noticing a couple strange things too. Wouldn’t it be better for us to not stay at a village like this and just keep going?”

Hye-su and Joon-ho feel uneasy about this village. Kang Chun-seong hasn’t said anything but he is of the same opinion.

I speak.

“Like you guys are saying, this village is suspicious. But we have to pause at this village.”

Everyone looks doubtful. Like they’re asking me why.

I say.

“Let’s say we just pass this village and keep going the way we were going. You think we can evade the lycanthropes chasing us?”

“...”

“... I guess not. They are a lot faster than we are.”

Yep.

My conclusion is the same.

“Then think. With our pace, we can’t evade the lycanthropes and it’s too much to fight every time we get attacked. The bastards aren’t stupid either so now they won’t be careless and they’ll come attack in bigger groups.”

The Mosin-Nagant isn’t an automatic gun that can spray bullets and we have limited ammunition.

“But they won’t have given us an impossible mission. Somewhere, there is for sure a hint to clearing this mission and I think that hint is in this village.”

Chapter 41 - The Ranch (Part 1)

We killed three in the first fight and killed seven in the second fight. How will the lycanthropes, who have similar intellect as humans, react to this?

After suffering such fatalities, they won't remain careless, and in the least, might they not come attacking in scores?

In that case, even if we were to walk fast, there is no way for us to evade the lycanthropes. Eventually, the situation is that we will have to face and fight them but if that is the case, we are at a disadvantage.

Last night, we trapped the seven lycanthropes in a trick and annihilated them easily, but that was a victory by strategy.

If we fought in a forest full of obstacles against a larger party, I am not confident we would win.

‘But there is no exam that cannot be cleared.’

It's my guess that the hint to clearing this exam is in this village.

I mean the village people that are living smack dab in the middle of the lycanthrope territory.

They neither have weapons or wariness, let alone any watchdogs!

‘It makes no sense that there’s no dogs.’

It’s a truth I realized only a moment ago, that because lycanthropes can change into humans, that in order to distinguish them, watchdogs are needed. A village on hostile terms with lycanthropes should have watchdogs at its entrance.

But in this village, there isn’t a single dog.

‘I’ll investigate a bit more.’

I summon Sylph and begin to explore the village and gather information.

At the village square, a dozen people approached the chief that had just returned from escorting the group to the empty house.

“Chief, what happened?”

“I put them in the house that Jason used to live in.”

“Isn’t this too dangerous, chief? They said they fought with those monsters.”

“My goodness, they said they killed ten...”

The boys, here and there, their expressions, were stricken with fear.

“They are dangerous ones, indeed.”

As they chatted, the chief became lost in thought.

The lycanthropes that controlled this area, the silver clan is a subject of terror to this village's citizens. To the point that they could not even have any thoughts of daring to resist.

So the appearance of travelers that fought and killed ten of that silver clan is plenty enough to send the village into shock.

“Maybe they're bluffing? Travelers that roam about often like to brag.”

“Yeah, yeah. I think that too. I'm sure they just want to put on airs with us.”

“I'm sure in reality they didn't even meet any lycanthropes or they barely escaped, one of the two.”

The men badmouthed the visitors and were intent on belittling them.

But the chief shook his head.

“They do not appear to be bluffing. They were too sincere to be.”

At the chief’s words, the atmosphere settled again.

“What if they are strong travelers? Ajumma Barry said so. She said they didn’t seem to be scared of lycanthropes at all.”

“That’s right. If they really are so strong they consider lycanthropes just some post-dinner exercise...”

“That is impossible.”

The chief spoke firmly.

“It is probably true that they did kill ten lycanthropes. But they probably aren’t that strong.”

“You think so?”

“You never know.”

At the men’s rebuttals, the chief spoke again.

“You idiots. Recall that silver leader.”

At those words, the men's expressions changed.

The silver leader.

The silver clan's lycanthrope leader himself is shock and terror. There is most likely no one entity stronger in this world.

"There is no person human that can look at that and not be scared. These travelers merely have not seen him yet."

"Then, then, what?"

"We carry on as always."

The chief's eyes turned cold.

"Put sleeping pills in the food to be served to them. They may catch onto something so split it into their lunch and dinner. And notify all this to the silver clan. The silver clan will probably know already."

"Yes."

"Understood, chief."

As he turned away, the chief mumbled.

“As always. That will do. We don’t need any unexpected change.”

As he returned to his home, the chief mumbled to himself.

“We have lived well up to this point...”

And from above, there was someone small, watching the scene down below.

-Meow.

The life in the form of a cat, made of wind, wagged its tail.

The chief proceeded on schedule.

He sent one man to the silver clan to relay the news, and he ordered the village women to serve food to the travelers. Of course, it’s a meal with sleeping pills.

Periodically, he pretended to ask the travelers how they were holding up, as he watched their movements, and perhaps the sleeping pills worked or they had relaxed, because the travelers went to bed early.

‘All according to plan.’

The chief laughed quietly to himself and went home.

The home of the chief who lived alone, without a family, is dreary.

The chief took out some wine from a cupboard and pours it into a cup, and drinks. It is the time of day he likes the most. In this barren village, there is no equal to its luxury.

To age and grow old itself is a luxury here. Where living a day more is lucky, the chief is the oldest person in this village.

That is power.

The chief found pleasure every day in sweet power.

Suddenly he thought of the travelers that came to the village.

For sure, they passed various adventures to survive to this point.

These travelers were strong enough to win against lycanthropes, more incredible than an old chief from a small village.

‘Unfortunate.’

They are young people who have, for sure, lived more incredible lives than that lived by this old man, and their fates will not pass past this night.

He pitied their tragic fate, and at the fact that he could still feel pity, the chief oddly felt excitement and gratification. It is because he can conclude that he is better because in the end, he is alive.

“You are young and your prime with futures ahead, do not resent us so much.”

He mumbled so and took another sip of his wine.

But then.

“Don’t you mean if you do something worth resenting, you are ready to receive resentment?”

“Hu uk!”

From a voice heard behind his back, the chief felt like his heart would stop from alarm.

Ssengurang!

In his surprise he drops his cup which breaks and the wine wets the floor.

The chief turns and looked behind him.

And his two eyes grew wide.

Someone that should be out cold from sleeping pills right now is standing right in front of him.

It's obvious, but we didn't touch our food.

The village women, who brought us our food with sleeping pills in them and told us to enjoy our meal as they smiled, were frightening.

How used to this are they?

I wonder how many travelers they tricked that they are so comfortable with it.

As it grew dark, I used Sylph's skills to eliminate any noise and infiltrated the chief's house.

For a person that entrapped a visiting group, he showed no guilt and his free and easy going spirit is despicable.

"You... you... how did you...!"

“I came to thank you for the great meal.”

“Oh, really? Haha, there’s no need for that...”

“Give me a seat, why don’t you. You don’t have any more chairs?”

“Haha, sure. Actually, let me call someone to get you something to drink.”

Call someone.

I can tell a lot of things from this trivial behavior in getting someone else for something so small. This is the chief, exercising his power as the strongest person in the village.

At most, where does this power come from, in an old man?

I now realize what that is.

“Shut up and sit.”

“...!”

At my words, the chief who had been trying to leave his house, freezes.

“If you don’t shut up and sit down, I’ll gouge your eyes out.”

I threaten him strongly, one more time. Well, that’s an expression I learned from Kang Chun-seong.

Luckily, the chief seems to think I am a person capable of doing so. Stricken with fear, he obligingly sits down in his seat.

I gaze around the house and bring a chair I see and sit across from him.

“In the dead of night there is no one watching guard, and as for scouts, you only have but two. A village like this surviving in the lycanthrope district is as plain as day.”

I continue speaking.

“You have a mutual agreement with the lycanthropes, or you’re ruled by the lycanthropes, one of the two. Am I wrong?”

“That, um...”

“If you don’t answer, I’m going to cut off your fingers one at a time.”

“Hik! Yes, that’s correct!”

“Then, in what way do you sustain your relationship with the lycanthropes? I thought about it through and through and came up with some hypothesis, listen.”

I continue talking.

“You said this village is made up of people escaping from a corrupt lord? I think that part is true. Only then does this make sense. People who are escaping from the heavy taxes keep coming into this village, and every time, you guys feed them sleeping agents and serve them up to the lycanthropes as meals, and with that price, you retain your lives.”

“You probably have people coercing others to come to this foreign village? If you don’t do that and offer those people up, you’ll become the meals. Am I wrong?”

“You’re right.”

The chief continues speaking with a shaky voice.

“We do not want to do these deeds either. If we were strong like you guys, I’m sure we would have fought these heinous lycanthropes! But we are not strong...”

The chief’s eyes start to water. He continues talking, as if this is cathartic to him.

“How many village citizens became their meal! If I think about all the family and neighbors we have had to sacrifice to survive...”

I can't go on listening to it and speak.

“Sylph, cut off a finger.”

-Meow!

Su kuk!

With the wind dagger, Sylph cuts off the chief's right thumb.

“Uhaaack!”

The chief sees his right hand with a missing finger and his eyes get bigger and he screams.

This despicable old man's screams didn't escape out of the house. It is because I used Sylph to eliminate the noise.

“Acccck!”

The chief kept on screaming out loud.

He seems to be trying to call in villagers with his screams. Up to his tricks amidst this, I chuckle.

“Shut up.”

Chul suk! (slap)

I lash out at his cheeks until he becomes blank. He looks like he can't believe he is being slapped by a guy young like me.

“What? You flustered?”

I grab the chief's chin and lift his face up and stare him in the eyes.

“You lived ruling this village like a king, never thought you'd be here like this?”

“That, uh...”

“A dirty old man like you, I think I get how you can live here, treating others like servants.”

“ ... ”

“In this village over 200 people, of the people that are over 50 years old, there's only you.”

The chiefs two eyes get wide.

I've hit a nerve.

I make a cynical smile.

“You probably gave any old person up to the lycanthropes. And the person who decides who becomes a meal, is you. Having received that responsibility from the lycanthropes, you set yourself up as the leader.”

“It's, it's something someone must do. If not for me, this village...”

“Then shall we test your sacrifice, considering your sincerity for this village?”

I grab the chiefs collar and pull him close to me and speak.

“You called the lycanthropes to this village, didn't you? I'm going to use you, chief, and kill all of those bastards. But thinking about this village's safety, you cannot align yourselves with us and make enemies with the lycanthropes. But of course, if you don't cooperate, I will kill you. So, how's that? Want to show us your noble sacrifice?”

Chapter 42 - The Ranch (Part 2)

I really was prepared to do all kinds of terrible things to the chief.

There's nothing to hold me back from a wicked man who serves up humans as food to monsters. He's a man a hundred times more wicked than Park Go-chan.

But that kind of conviction of mine was unnecessary.

"I, I will. Whatever it is, I will oblige. What do I need to do?"

At the chief's reply, I smile.

'I knew you would.'

The outsiders that came upon this village and when needed, even the same village people, he offered them up as food to lycanthropes.

Basically, he is the lycanthropes' agent.

There is no way a person like this has any altruism.

"When are the lycanthropes coming to this village?"

"They are coming tonight. They will probably be here shortly."

“How many?”

“Usually they come in pairs.”

“Do they come to the village entrance?”

“Yes.”

“Tell me everything you know about the lycanthropes.”

At my words, the chief paused momentarily and then began his explanation.

“The lycanthropes that control this district have silver fur and they are known as the Silver Clan, and to my knowledge, their numbers are over a hundred now.”

“A hundred?!”

I’m shocked.

According to the Korean Arena Research Center, at most, the lycanthrope group was a few tens.

But a hundred?

“They weren’t so numerous to begin with. Just twenty years ago they barely numbered 20.”

Following the information from the research center, lycanthropes live in family groups.

The father became the leader and lived with a group of his wives and children. According to the father’s ability, he would be able to gather more wives and his offspring would increase.

The size of the group is determined by the amount of land they control.

It is because the number of offspring is determined by how much prey can be gathered from the hunting.

The group is formed from family units and they survive through hunting, so the scale of the group always stays consistent.

But the Silver Clan, these lycanthropes succeeded in increasing their group’s numbers by a new survival method.

‘An incredible revolution!’

I find the Silver Clan’s leader to be great.

It can be compared to the way prehistoric humans exploded in population due to farming.

The bastards moved from getting food from hunting to ‘ranching!’

Ranching.

It’s a despicable phrase.

By chance, as humans trickled into their territory, the Silver Clan’s leader picked up a new opportunity.

Let the humans develop their village, and run this village like a ranch, periodically getting supplied with food.

As they safely gathered quantities of food, they quickly propagated and succeeded in growing a clan to a hundred members.

Growing the family group fives time in twenty years signified that the Silver Clan’s leader has big ambitions. To succeed in his ambitions, he is growing his clan’s power.

‘Damn it. The research center’s opinion was wrong. We should’ve chosen to pass through the troll’s territory!’

If this enemy lycanthrope group were normal, our group’s abilities would have been more than adequate to defeat them.

But the enemy is a lycanthrope clan of one hundred that is led by a leader that is smart enough to innovate.

It would have been better to go through the troll territory.

No matter how strong trolls are, they don't behave in group actions so we could have evaded and passed through.

'In this case, if we don't' use this village, there is no way we will clear this mission!'

It may turn out that I have to make a cruel decision far worse than the things the drastic chief has done.

That night, I use the chief to tell the village people not to come out of their homes.

Then I go out with my teammates to the village street and stakeout the entrance. The plan is to take out the lycanthropes all at once when they reach the village.

-Meow!

A little while later, Sylph returns from scouting and draws a number 4.

It means 4 lycanthropes are headed our way.

I speak to Kang Chun-seong.

“When I give you the signal, go out first and get their attention so they look towards you momentarily. Because I’m going to use that moment to snipe them. And we have to leave one alive to return.”

“Understood.”

Finally, the lycanthropes appear. The bastards just confidently walk straight through the front entrance.

And now, this is the beginning.

“Okay, now go.”

I tap the chief in the shoulder.

“Uh...!”

The chief is so stricken by fear that initially, he could not move forward.

I get close to the chief’s ear and whisper.

“If you try anything, Sylph will slit your throat.”

“I, I understand.”

“Now go.”

The chief looked like he was about to cry and gets pushed out by me.

The chief approached the lycanthropes that have come to the village. The chief that was stricken in fear, as if he never was, bowed his head and greeted them.

“Oh my, welcome. We have been eagerly awaiting your arrival.”

It's not a greeting, he's practically receiving them.

“Where are they?”

Asked one lycanthrope from amongst them. The chief pointed them towards our lodgings.

“Like always, we fed them sleeping agents and have put them to sleep. Those fellows, they suspected nothing and passed right out.”

“Lead us.”

“Yes, yes. Follow me.”

The chief took the lead and started to walk. It's some amazing

acting. The secret to that acting is brazenness. Up to now, just like this, he has offered up his own, people, as food to these monsters, and the thought of all of this is simply contemptible.

“Now.”

At my word, Kang Chun-seong nodded his head, then runs out.

At the same time, I implement another intervention.

“Weapon.”

The Mosin-Nagant rifle appeared in my right hand. I hand over the rifle to Sylph.

“Huh?”

“What’s this?”

The lycanthropes look at the suddenly racing Kang Chun-seong with suspicion. To them, it is strange to have a meal (human) come at them in this village that is the same as a pantry.

But they quickly become flustered.

Tang!

With a gunshot, one of their heads explodes.

“Huk!”

“No, no?!”

Without knowing the cause, a fellow lycanthrope that had come with them died instantly and it threw the lycanthropes into chaos.

“Uhik! Save, save...!”

With petrified screaming, the chief ran away.

Without losing that moment, Kang Chun-seong boldly ran in and did a midair spin kick.

Pat!

But maybe the move was too big of an attack. The lycanthropes promptly scatter.

Kang Chun-seong lands and immediately heads for the lycanthrope to his right.

“How dare a human!”

The angered lycanthrope slashed around his heinously long and

sharp claws.

Kang Chun-seong whipped his left arm and eliminated the attack. At the same time, with his right hand, grabbed and pulled on his knee. At that critical juncture, the lycanthrope loses his balance and falls down.

Kang Chun-seong has attained the superior position and landed punches like rapid fire.

Pupupupupupuk-

Kang Chun-seong turned the lycanthrope into rice cakes with his amazingly fast paced consecutive strikes.

In that time, Sylph has pulled the bolt and got rid of the empty cartridge and targeted again.

Tang-

“Kuhung!”

This time, a lycanthrope has been shot in the heart. Holding the hole in his chest and with a blank stare, his dead appearance makes an impression.

Now, there is only two remaining. No,

Oodoodook!

Kang Chun-seong's punch crushed a lycanthrope's neck. Now there's only one left.

"How, how could this be! They tricked us!"

The one remaining lycanthrope glared with rage at the chief that is in the distance. The chief doesn't know what to do and shakes.

"Just you wait! We'll punish you all!"

The lycanthrope turned around and began to run.

"It would be strange just to let him return unharmed. Sylph, shoot its left leg."

-Meow.

At my words, Sylph pulled the trigger without hesitation.

Taang-

"Ggaeng!"

A sad noise can be heard and a limp running lycanthrope's silhouette soon disappeared into the darkness.

Well, 4 lycanthropes is an easy victory. Not to mention, it wasn't a success from a direct confrontation, but a one-sided ambush.

But the chief who contributed greatly to this success is about to burst into tears.

“But now, what is to come of our village...”

What.

You're all doomed by the lycanthropes.

The chief who contributed to the attack will no doubt wish for all the lycanthropes to die. That way, it won't be found out that he cooperated with us.

But I purposely left one alive to return. Now, soon, the Silver Clan will know that the chief sided with us and led them to a trap.

This village has become an enemy of the Silver Clan.

I approach the chief and speak.

“Now the bastards will take this incidence as a sign that this village has joined us to defy the Silver Clan.”

“ ... ”

“Now you and your people have no choice. You have to join forces with us and fight them.”

“You say such impossible things...!”

“Did you not just clearly see with your own two eyes? How easily we eliminated them, I mean.”

“Well, even so, the Silver Clan numbers over a hundred! Even with how strong you guys are, even if we all join forces to defy them, there is no chance for victory!”

“So? You’re going to try now to lower your tail? Will you try to explain that it was all a misunderstanding, that you were threatened by us and had no choice?”

The chief is at a loss for words. I laugh coldly.

“Of course, if you plead like that, the village may continue to exist, but do you think you, the chief, will be able to keep your life?”

“...!”

“Even if you were threatened, you contributed in killing their kind, they probably won’t let you live. I think they’ll make an

example of you and kill you quite grotesquely?”

“Then, then, what am I to do now?”

“Like I said. Fight with us. Shouldn’t you have to desperately convince the village people to fight against the lycanthropes in order to save your own life?”

The village citizens, who have for a long time been under the rule of the lycanthropes, will not have the courage to pick up weapons and fight, not now.

But if the citizens say they will not fight, out of fear, the chief is a dead man. He has to pay for having cooperated with us.

In order for the chief to save just his one life, he has to instigate the village to fight.

“The Silver Clan leader is an incredible beast. R-really, are you confident you can win?”

“You saw the weapon I have, right? With that, no matter how strong the bastard is, he’ll die in an instant.”

I said confidently.

The chief, with his shaky body, nodded his head.

“I understand. I will convince the village people and have them fight.”

“You made the right choice. Let’s think of this positively. Isn’t this a good opportunity to escape the pitiful lives of being the livestock supply?”

“...”

The chief had been made to carry a heavy burden and with his head hung low, he disappeared to somewhere.

“Hyung, you’re amazing! Was this your plan from the beginning?”

Joon-ho raced towards me, fanatic.

I nodded my head.

“The chief is a selfish man, it was easy to manipulate him.”

It’s probably because of that, that the lycanthropes made the chief their agent.

“If we fight with the village people, that should be enough for fighting the lycanthropes.”

Hye-su is happy too.

But I shook my head.

“That won’t work.”

“Huh?”

“Forgot? We only have a few days left. Our mission is not to eliminate the lycanthropes, it is to escape this forest.”

“Oh! Then what are you going to do?”

At that question, I replied in a cold tone.

“We pit this village and the lycanthropes in a fight, and we use that to run away.”

Chapter 43 - Escape (Part 1)

“Now is finally the time to come out from under the lycanthropes’ rule!”

The chief had gathered all the village people and is delivering an impassioned speech.

“Raising us like livestock and using us as feed, how long will we live, bowing our heads!”

That shouldn’t be what he says, as the one who was the first to bow his head.

The village people are obviously flustered by their chief suddenly turned fighter.

“Um, chief, what is the reason you are suddenly saying these things?”

“It’s not like we live in submission because we like them. With what will we fight them?”

The men raise a good question.

The chief pointed towards us and spoke.

“It is because these people are here!”

Everyone's attention turned towards us.

With an uncomfortable expression, Hye-su bent her neck down. Joon-ho looked like his conscience had been stabbed too.

After hearing my true plan, the two keep looking that way.

Gather the village people and make them fight the lycanthropes, we pretend to fight with them, and flee. It's a cruel plan that uses the village citizens as a mere sacrifice to give ourselves more time.

I know it too.

That this is worse than what the chief has done all this time.

At least the chief had the excuse that what he did was for the survival of the village.

On the other hand, I have given them the hope of freedom and instead lead them into death. For the survival of the four of us.

‘Regardless, the village people can't be much help.’

They are people that have, so far, just been helplessly controlled. Joining forces with these people won't give us a chance at winning against 100 lycanthropes. Also, the silver clan's leader is very smart and strong.

‘In that case...!’

In that case, sacrificing these people so we can escape is better.

A village like this should disappear anyway.

... Is how I try to make sense of it.

So, what?

Where is there a person in this village who is without sin?

This village isn’t full of weak people without guilt. They offered fellow humans up to monsters to live themselves. Being weak and good are not synonymous.

So even if we flip it and push these people to their deaths, its self-defense!

“These travelers have said that they will rid us of them! I have seen it. The four lycanthropes that came to our village were dealt with in the blink of an eye, a splendor difficult to believe!”

Whether he knows my intentions or not, the chief convinces the village with his strong tone.

Unbelievably, the villagers that said how are we to fight, gradually become convinced by the chief.

They eventually had a hopeful look in their eyes as they looked at us. Their gaze, as if we are the deliverers of their liberation and freedom.

Amongst the citizens, one man suddenly asks us a question.

“Are you really going to fight for us?”

At that question, Hye-su and Joon-ho flinch.

I step up.

“Fighting for you all? That expression sounds a bit weird.”

“Huh?”

“You speak as if we will fight for free instead of you guys to get you your freedom. We are not fighting for you, we will fight together.”

At the mention of fighting, the citizens' expressions grow dark again. They are fearful.

“If you do not all raise your weapons and fight the lycanthropes,

we for sure do not have a reason to fight. If not, we will just leave. You all will probably suffer the retaliation of the dead lycanthropes. The bastards probably already believe that you have sided with us against them.”

“We aren’t the ones that killed the lycanthropes!”

“You guys killed them! This situation is all your fault!”

“That’s right, we’re without fault here!”

They try to pass on the blame and their behavior makes me scoff.

“Did you just say you are without fault? Is it not wrong that you put sleeping agents in our food? Even though the ones who tried to offer us up as wolf food are all gathered here? If I wanted I could retaliate for that and just kill you all right now and leave.”

Mixing in threats and speaking forcefully, the citizens flinch.

Stricken with fear, the only way to work with these people is through fear.

“Decide if you will fight or not. If you do not wish to fight, we will just depart now.”

The citizens stare at each other.

“Of course we’ll fight! These people say they will fight with us. We will not get another opportunity like this!”

Said the chief.

The women are overcome with anxiety, and the men approve one by one.

“I, I will fight.”

“Now that this is the situation, there’s no choice but to fight.”

“Even if we continue living like this, I won’t last long and become food anyway.”

The chief rejoices and talks to me.

“Did you see? We are resolved to fight.”

“Then prepare to fight. We don’t have much time. Do you have weapons?”

“We have some bows we use for hunting and some axes we use for cutting wood. Any other weapons we had were confiscated...”

‘Figures.’

There's no way they would let slaves keep weapons.

“Prepare as many bows and arrows as you can, and according to the number of people, sharpen some wood and make spears.”

“Understood. Did everyone hear that?”

“Yes!”

The men get busy moving.

I make more requests to the chief.

“Take all the able bodied men into groups of four, and have them take turns scouting the fence. When the bastards appear, have the men shout out the alarm.”

“Okay, got it. And what about you guys...?”

“First, we will patrol around this area and return. And dispose of these corpses.”

I point to the three dead lycanthrope corpses.

“Okay.”

The chief believes my words without any suspicion.

I gesture to my teammates.

“Let’s go. Joon-ho and Kang Chun-seong, lift a corpse each.”

“Okay, hyung.”

“Will do.”

Joon-ho, Kang Chun-seong, and I each take a corpse onto our shoulders. Hye-su follows, and together we head out the village.

“Hyung, why did we bring the corpses out with us?”

“First, we have to harvest the majeong.”

“Ah...”

“We have another use for the corpses but first, let’s get the majeong.”

I have Sylph get the majeong from inside the corpses. Hye-su puts the three majeong into the item bag.

I look around our surroundings and cut down some vines.

I wrap the vines around the lycanthropes' necks and hang them from a tree. Three lycanthrope corpses hanging from a tree.

This is an adequate set up for provoking the silver clan guys.

“Hyung, this...”

“Is a provocation. When they see this they will be enraged. How do you think they will react when they see the villagers holding weapons, prepared to fight?”

“...probably attack?”

“Yep, we have to eliminate the chance for dialogue. We have to make sure both sides fight.”

To the lycanthropes, this village was an important food supply source. If the lycanthropes kill all the villagers, it's a big loss for them too.

They will decide there is no point to dialogue. They will mount an attack quickly, and at that, the villagers will resist.

While they are fighting, we have to make our escape as and run as far as possible.

‘Then it will be okay.’

There is nothing more important than clearing the test.

“Let’s go now. We don’t have much time.”

“Okay...”

Hye-su’s reply is quite weak. I see her feeling guilty and it makes my heart uncomfortable.

But I am convinced I am right. This is the only way to clearing this exam.

We head west.

“So, you are the only one to survive and return?”

“Yes, father! That old chief tricked us!”

The brothers that were sent to the village have all died and only one has returned, limping his leg.

As the news that the village people have dared to rebel has gotten the silver clan furious.

“We must kill all of them!”

“How dare they kill our brothers! The humans have all gone crazy!”

“We have to kill them brutally!”

The lycanthropes growled as they condemned the humans. It seems their wild nature that enjoys slaughter has been awakened.

But the father remains cool-headed.

He stays deep in thought, then asks his surviving and returned son.

“And you survived?”

“Yes, thankfully, I was hit in the leg and able to escape.”

“What about the humans’ weapon?”

“Like Helgi said, with a loud ‘tang’ sound, something so fast that it could not be seen flew by quickly and burrowed into flesh. Together with the sound, my brothers died.”

“But you successfully survived?”

“I was lucky.”

The father looks at his son coldly. Then he breaks into a smile.

“I don’t think so?”

“Yes?”

“The way I see it, I think the bastards let you survive and return.”

“...?”

Ignoring his son who can’t understand the reason, the father gets up from his seat.

He speaks to all the lycanthropes that have gathered on the hill.

“Everyone prepare to fight. Before the day brightens, we will end this fight.”

The lycanthropes feel joy and excitement. The word fight always gets their bloods to go.!!

“Wooooo-!”

“Woo-!”

Deep in the night, the cry of the lycanthropes from atop the hill spreads drearily throughout the night sky.

The father gestures to Helgi.

Helgi promptly approaches.

“Yes, father.”

“Take everyone and attack the village.”

“Me? Then father...”

“I have something else I need to check.”

That is all he says as father just smiles.

The village men hold their cut spears and prepared to fight.

Everyone is grimly determined.

They are people that escaped from a murderous tax. But after fleeing from the lord's tyranny and hiding in the forest, a more fearful ruler was waiting for them.

The lycanthropes collected not money, nor grain, but human life.

Everyone lived, suffering under the pressure that their fates would be that one day, they would be wolf food. It was a life so pitiful that they might long for the tyranny of the lord.

Unable to stand it any longer, there were those that tried to escape this forest but eventually, their heads would appear the next day in the village.

Living wasn't living.

But even that living is over with today.

After deciding they would fight, the villagers who suffered in terror explode into a rage. Rather than return to how it was before, they decide whether they live or die, they will see an end.

Then.

Woooo-!!

Kuhoooo!

The howl of the lycanthropes resonates out everywhere. The village citizens are scared out of their wits.

“It’s, it’s them!”

“They’re already here!”

“Everyone work together! We have to fight!”

The villagers have lived a long while having seen lycanthropes and know. That these howls now are full of extreme rage.

“But what happened to those people?”

Someone asks the question.

The men look at each other and wonder, then look to their chief.

“Those, those people, they said they were leaving to go scout...”

The chief’s face is frozen in confusion.

Why have the people who said they are scouting not appeared even when the lycanthropes have drawn so close?

Chapter 44 - Escape (Part 2)

It's a tight schedule.

I lead my teammates in as fast a pace as possible.

‘We have no time.’

If I were the lycanthrope leader, I would extinguish the village rebellion as fast as possible. There is no need to give the villagers ample time to prepare for the fight.

What I can be sure of is that they will not attack the village hastily.

They will know that we are with the villagers.

Fearing the power of the rifle we have, they won't attack rashly and will behave carefully.

The longer the fight, the better.

The longer it gets, the more time we will have to escape.

‘About now, will the village people will have realized we ran away?’

The chief, who is accustomed to petty tricks, will have probably have caught on by now.

But it's no use.

The dice has already been rolled, and even without us, they have no choice but to fight. If they were to surrender now, there is no guarantee that the lycanthropes would forgive them.

You get older, and you get eaten.

How can you live under that kind of fate? I have no confidence that I could live such a pitiful life without a future.

That's probably how they villagers feel now.

What they needed was something to explode that pent-up powder keg. It exploded now, and they'll fight with reckless abandon.

The fact that hundreds will die due to me weighs heavily on my heart.

'My eyes were indeed not wrong. Didn't I say so? Examinee Kim Hyun-ho is a person plenty capable.'

The baby angel's words cross my mind.

‘Every moment, your decisions and action were bold and cold. What average person could do as examinee Kim Hyun-ho did? Now do you realize that you are not an average person, but a very special human?’

“That damned...”

I carelessly spit out profanities.

“What is it?”

Asked a surprised Joon-ho. Hye-su and Kang Chun-seong are looking at me too.

“Do all of you think what I did was wrong?”

I ask.

“Was there another option besides sacrificing the villagers?”

The atmosphere becomes solemn.

“You were right.”

The one who said that was Kang Chun-seong.

“The people in that village are not simply weak and kind. If you

had not caught on to the chief's plans, it is clear what fate we would have suffered."

"..."

"Those people tried to kill us so that they could live. As a human, instead of upholding morals, they prioritized their own survival, and we are merely making the same decision. If they had approached us with goodwill, we would not have made this decision."

"...You think so?"

"I do, so do not think anything of it."

Joon-ho and Hye-su both say a word.

"I think you were right too, hyung."

"I didn't think you were wrong either, oppa. It's just... I just found this situation where we had to make such a decision to be harsh."

"I understand. I didn't make that decision because I liked it. Okay, let's go."

I continued moving. My teammates followed.

Kang Chun-seong that said if they have approached us with goodwill, we would not have been able to make this decision.

... Would I really?

Had they been kind people, would I have been unable to use them?

I cannot be sure.

What kind of person I am, how these exams are changing me as a person, I cannot be sure.

More time will pass, more exams experienced, and in time it may come that I do not suffer this anguish. Emotion may erode down and I may thirst for it.

After becoming a person like that, will I still be able to laugh with my family?

‘I don’t know.’

Let’s stop thinking thoughts like this.

First, I have to survive.

We walked absent-mindedly. We don’t say a word to each other,

and just walk.

Finally, an exhausted Hye-su speaks.

“Let’s rest and continue.”

“Oh, sorry. Now that I think of it, we didn’t rest once. Are your feet okay?”

“Not much of a problem but the blisters have popped and it’s a little uncomfortable. I’ll treat it for a bit.”

“Okay.”

We rest for a short while.

Hye-su tooks off her shoes and socks. Her tiny foot has exploded blisters and is a mess.

Thankfully, we have a really good healing potion. 19th turn Yoo Ji-soo’s team gifted us the healing potion.

Hye-su opens the healing potions stopper and pours a very small amount onto her foot and spreads it like an ointment. Then, surprisingly, the injury from the broken blister quickly closes.

Joon-ho and I look at it with wide open eyes.

“Wow, that result is really immediate.”

“Seriously.”

At that rate, I think even a large injury will get healed right away.

After treating all her wounds, Hye-su puts her socks and shoes back on.

I summon Sylph.

“Sylph, scout for us please.”

-Meow.

Sylph quickly disappears somewhere.

But she returns much faster than usual and lets out a sharp cry.

-Meow!

We are surprised and stand up right away.

“Is it an enemy?”

Sylph nods her head and moves quickly and draws a number with her body.

The number is '1.'

“One enemy?”

-Meow.

Sylph nods her head.

“Is it a lycanthrope?”

I think maybe not so I ask, and this time too, Sylph nods her head.

Only one lycanthrope has followed us. What is it thinking? Has it forgotten that the number of lycanthropes that have died because of us is 13?

“And the distance?”

Sylph draws a number 272.

‘Okay. One shot with the gun.’

“Weapon.”

The Mosin-Nagant appears in my right hand. I take out the bullets I had stored in my pocket and load, and hand it to Sylph.

“Let’s finish this now.”

-Meow.

Sylph nods her head and quickly gets into shooting position and then pulls the trigger.

Tang-

The shot rings long.

“Did you get it?”

Sylph shakes her head.

I’m suspicious.

Sylph shot the gun and didn’t get it in one shot? Sylph would not have made a mistake.

“Shoot until you get it.”

-Meow.

Then, Sylph shoots 4 consecutive shots.

As she is done with the loaded 5 bullets, with an awkward expression on her face, she looks at me.

I give her another clip with 5 bullets.

Sylph loads it quickly and begins to shoot again.

Tang, click, tang, click.

Sylph keeps shooting.

She's shot this many times and she still hasn't got it?

I think maybe, and ask.

“Is it holding something like a shield?”

Sylph nods her head.

‘I knew it.’

Last time, one of them used its buddy's corpse as a shield and ran

off. It seems this one has heard of the incident and is using a similar approach.

“Everyone, get ready. Something isn’t right.”

“Yes, hyung.”

“Got it.”

Joon-ho and Hye-su take out their respective weapons.

But then.

-Nyaaaaaaah!

Sylphs lets out a stinging scream. It sounds like she is warning us. When we are surprised by her sound, something flies in like a flash.

Swish-Kwajik!

“Kuhuk!”

With a terrifying sound of impact are cries of the throes of death. It’s Joon-ho’s voice.

“Kyaaak! Joon-ho!”

Hye-su screams out loud.

What on earth has happened. I turn around behind me.

‘...?!’

I am so shocked I cannot say anything.

An arrow is pierced in Joon-ho’s chest. Very deeply into his heart.

Joon-ho’s eyes are in a wide eyed state, without a gaze, dead.

He is just there, dead.

When just a moment ago, he, Joon-ho, he was alive.

“Sylph! Get rid of all the arrows that come at us!”

-Meow!

Answers Sylph.

But it is a measure that is too late. Joon-ho is already dead.

‘It would have been good to know just a little sooner!’

I get angry at myself.

It is using a shield, and possesses intellect similar to a human’s. If that’s the case, I should have thought of it possibly using weapons.

I felt like blaming Sylph.

Why did she not alert us to this fact! Why did she only cry out an alarm and not block the arrow that flew in at Joon-ho!

It is the limits of a spirit who cannot talk and without a command, cannot do anything proactively.

Then, Joon-ho’s shield and spear disappear. The owner has died and his items too, have ceased to exist.

-Meow.

Sylph quietly alerts me.

Swish-

Another arrow that comes flying.

This time, Sylph uses her wind dagger and shatters the arrow.

Pajik!

The arrow is sliced into many pieces and scatter on the ground. It was an arrow aimed for me.

“So you are the spirit summoner.”

From the front somewhere, a stately male voice can be heard.

It's a lycanthrope.

The bastard keeps talking.

“Ho, that item that the spirit is holding is that problematic weapon.”

“ ... ”

“A form with a long shape and a hole... so the iron gets shot from that hole? Then I just have to avoid to where that hole is pointing.”

Its impressive observations and decision making.

“It appears you only have one of that weapon. But that makes this too easy?”

“ ... ”

“Our silver clan too, but lycanthropes disregard humans too much. That’s why we don’t use very many man-made things. But if used well, the results are very good. Like right now.”

This bastard is remarkable.

I suspect it so I ask.

“Are you the lycanthropes’ leader?”

He answers.

“I am.”

Of course!

How diligent...

A flexible mind that knows how to use human items.

This is the leader that introduced ‘ranching’ and grew the silver clan’s numbers by five times.

The conversation halts there.

The enemy is hiding somewhere and doesn't say anything more, and we can do nothing but prepare for the next attack.

Swish-

Another arrow flies in. And Sylph uses her wind dagger to eliminate the arrow.

The actions and behavior of the silver clan's leader who will not actively attack seems strange. As if time is on his side so he has no reason to hurry...

'Wait, time?'

Time!

I now catch on to what the silver clan's leader's plan is.

The bastard knows about the spirit summons. He knows very well that the time for keeping a spirit summoned is limited.

He is waiting for Sylph's summon time to end!

"Sylph, where is he?"

Sylph points to her one o'clock with her front paw.

“Distance?”

This time, with her tail, she draws a number 16 in the ground.

16 meters.

It is a close distance.

Then attacking the bastard right now and seeing to a victory is the best and wisest plan. As time gets dragged out, our team, with a limited spirit summons time, will be at the disadvantage.

But then, Sylph draws a number on the ground.

32.

Then she erases the numbers and fixes another number.

59.

I'm surprised and ask her.

“He's backing away?”

-Meow!

Sylph nods her head.

I feel a chill creep over me.;

The opponent has retreated far back enough so as to not be hit by the spirit's attacks.

The opponent accurately knows that spirit summons is timed and that the farther away from the spirit, it's power diminishes.

His plan is clear; that by sustaining a moderately far distance, he is planning on a dragged out battle.

If I try to save on the spirit summons time and send Sylph back, he might come closer again and shoot more arrows.

I have to frequently summon Sylph and save on the spirit summons time.

'The opponent is too smart.'

My heart is beating and thudding hard.

The fear creeps in.

With what and how will we fight a monster that is not only strong but also intelligent?

I cannot get a grasp of how to overcome this situation.

First, we have to move.

“Let’s go. We have to escape.”

“The bastard?”

Asked Kang Chun-seong.

“He wants to slowly get into a long battle. As time goes on, we are at a disadvantage. There is no other option but to escape out of this forest.”

“I understand.”

“Oppa... what about Joon-ho...”

Asks Hye-su, close to tears...”

Seeing Joon-ho lying there dead with an arrow in his heart, I feel as if my heart is ripping. I feel like he may get up any second and call me ‘hyung.’

“... let’s go. We have to go.”

I take the lead and walk, and Hye-su follows, holding back tears.

Kang Chun-seong walks in the back and watching our rear.

Chapter 45 - Escape (Part 3)

When you summon a spirit and the time runs out, the summon time recharges when the spirit is not summoned.

The recharge is one minute every five minutes.

Because of that, I would usually summon Sylph every five minutes and send her to scout for 1 minute.

There was the discomfort of having to summon her again every five minutes and then return her repeatedly, but I was able to sustain the summons time in case of a fight.

But now, the situation is very different.

I had no idea that the silver clan's leader would suddenly draw near and unbeknownst to us, shoot arrows.

We cannot go without Sylph for five minutes. So I've changed the summon time from the five minutes to 25 seconds.

I summon Sylph every 25 seconds and ask her.

“Where is he?”

And then Sylph will draw a number for how many meters away he is.

I return Sylph quickly before it reaches 5 seconds and call her again 25 seconds later and ask the same question.

The silver leader sometimes is further than 100 meters, and when checked at other times, as close as 60 meters, repeatedly drawing nearer and farther, making us nervous.

1 second, 2 seconds, 3 seconds, 4 seconds...

This situation where I have to constantly keep track of every second of time is making me lose my mind.

But I have go this far to spare the summons time if we are not to lose.

‘At this rate, I’ll become exhausted first.’

The position of having to track the 25 seconds while escaping is miserable.

But the bigger problem is our stamina.

‘He is probably thinking tactically, to just spend half a day chasing us.’

Will we be able to run for half a day without rest?

It is possible.

But the story becomes different with chasers on our tails.

He repeatedly shortens and lengthens the distance between us, making us extremely anxious. He occasionally shakes us up by shooting arrows towards us. He enjoys the tension between himself and the escaping prey.

We are mentally exhausted.

I am having problems, but Hye-su is struggling even more. With her weaker physique and the mental shock of Joon-ho's death, she gets exhausted even faster.

‘This won't do.’

I have to end this fight, no matter what.

No matter how smart or strong this bastard is, if he gets shot in the head, he'll die regardless.

I make an order to Sylph.

“Sylph, take the gun and go to his back and shoot.”

-Meow!

Her strength gets weaker as she gets farther from her summoner, me, but she should have enough power to pull the trigger.

Sylph takes the Mosin-Nagant and moves. A moment later,

Tang-Kkang!

The gunshot and the sound of metal rang at the same time.

It's a fail.

He blocked the shot with his shield.

Tang-tang-tang-

The gunshots continue to ring but the only noises to follow are the sound of them getting blocked on the shield. A moment later, Sylph has shot her five bullets and returns.

‘How does he know from which direction the shot is coming from?’

It is impossible that he senses the bullet coming in at supersonic speed. It means he catches on before it is shot.

Does he have a way of sensing where a spirit is?

I don't know.

I am so mentally exhausted that my head isn't spinning right.

Even after that, I attempt to snipe him a couple more times but they all failed. All it did was use summon time.

Time passes into daybreak.

“Oppa...”

Hye-su calls to me with a tired voice. She hands over her item bag to me.

“Oppa, you take this.”

“What?”

At my surprise, Hye-su weakly laughs as she speaks.

“Just in case, you know.”

In case...

Hye-su is probably thinking that of the three of us, she will be the first to die.

“Don’t think like that.”

“Take it, quick.”

“Hye-su...”

“My arm hurts.”

Eventually, I take the item bag from Hye-su.

“I’ll give it back to you after the exam.”

“Yep, when the exam is over.”

I get the item bag over from her and say ‘unequip.’ As I do so, the item bag disappears. It means the item bag is now in my possession.

Hye-su grows tired quickly.

In the suffocating anxiety, we don’t rest and keep walking and to her, it is too difficult. I feel like death myself, and she’s suffering even more.

This heart suffocating pressure...

My sense of duty to not let Hye-su die too, makes me more impatient.

I summon Sylph one more time.

“Sylph, attack him one more time. This time, from the right.”

-Meow!

Sylph takes the rifle and moves to the right.

Succeed this time!

But this time too, the shot is a failure.

Tang-kang!

The sound of the bullet hitting the shield rings hopelessly. The five shots consecutively get blocked by his shield.

But then after all that.

-Meeow!

Sylph comes back in a hurry and gives a sharp alarm.

‘No way?!’

It’s the impossible.

An arrow comes flying in. The bastard has come close and started a counterattack.

Thankfully, the arrow is blocked by Sylphs knife wind. She has understood the command from before to block any incoming arrows.

The arrows keep flying in.

And every time, the knife wind obliterated them.

But the knife wind uses a lot of power. The more it is used, the summons time shrinks!

“Sylph, hurry, reload!”

I shout as I hand her a 5 bullet clip.

Sylph continues to take down the arrows with her knife wind while she loads the gun.

But as she does it, like a lie, the arrow attack stops.

Sylph draws a number 43 in the ground with her tail. 58, 75...the bastard is backing away.

‘Damn it.’

No one is injured but we’ve taken on a lot of damage. Just now, blocking the barrage of arrows, all we have done is use up a shit ton of Sylph’s summons time.

The silver clan’s leader is extremely intelligent. It’s almost frightening how smart he is.

“He’s caught on to the fact we have to reload after every five bullets. That’s why after blocking the five bullets, he brazenly counterattacks.”

At my words, Kang Chun-seong sounds a subdued groan.

For a lycanthrope that has no experience with a gun, having found that out is an impressive feat.

“No one is hurt?”

At my question, Kang Chun-seong nods his head.

But Hye-su is in a poor state. She isn't injured anywhere but she's gripping her sword tightly with both hands and shaking.

"I can't take it anymore... hu hu huk!"

Hye-su drops her sword and explodes into tears. She is in a complete panic from the terror and exhaustion.

"Hye-su. I know it's hard but you have to pull through."

Hye-su sits on the floor, crying.

"I'm sorry, oppa. I don't think I can make it. It's too hard to keep walking."

"Let's get a little farther, Hye-su."

"Just leave me and go please. I can't. I'm exhausted!"

"Stop saying shit like that!"

I yell in anger.

"I'm sorry, oppa..."

She explodes into tears again.

Kang Chun-seong was staring at us and speaks.

“Let’s rest and continue. I am too tired.”

“... alright. That sounds fine.”

We all fall to the ground where we are standing and take a rest.

But we didn’t rest even for a minute. It’s because we heard the bastard speak.

“You are tired now?”

“...?!”

His voice is heard from a relatively close distance.

We’re startled and get up.

“I am sure the spirits powers are pretty much done as well?”

“Why don’t you test it?”

It was an accurate point but in order to hide it, I don’t back down and talk back to him.

But the bastard's chuckling can be heard all around us.

"You cannot trick me. I gathered as much from your tenacious attempts to see an end to the fight."

"So test us."

"Haha, you are a fun human. Of all the humans I've seen, you are the most intelligent and you are mentally strong."

"..."

"You threw all those villagers out as bait and attempted to flee, it's impressive. I thought maybe, and pursued. You will be the first fun hunt I've had in a while."

Hunt...

To him, all this is but a mere hunt.

I grind my teeth.

"Every now and then there is a human that runs away from the village. And every time, I go on a hunt like this. I invest the time, going slow. I shoot my arrows to instill fear, tormenting. Until the human succumbs and falls to fear and stress."

Then he laughs.

“Can you picture it? When I revealed myself, he was actually relieved. His expression, it begged me to kill him quickly, to get it over with. Seeing that moment when terror surpasses the desire to survive and live, I see that and feel a sense of accomplishment.”

He is so wicked.

He is intelligent and malicious. He has enjoyed toying and gaming with the minds of humans.

Because he is this kind of being, it is probably how he came to raise humans as livestock like ranches.

“It is okay to be prideful. I have enjoyed this game so far, and of all the games, no humans have lasted this long. I kind of want to enjoy it longer, but I will end it for you. I will see to it that we finish.”

I take the gun over from Sylph.

From a close distance, the knife wind is better than the gun.

The bush in front us moves and one being reveals himself.

Revealing himself to us for the first time, he is in his human

form.

He is a handsome man with tall height and shining silver hair. This must be his human transformation form.

In one hand, a shield, and in the other, he is holding a bow.

“Introductions first, I am the silver clan’s leader, Leon Silver.”

Leon Silver’s appearance starts to change.

Fur starts to grow all over his body and his build gets bigger. His nails get longer. And he becomes neither a human or beast, covered in silver fur.

He is a lycanthrope larger than any other.

I am overwhelmed for a while and come to my senses and shout to Sylph.

“Attack!”

-Meow!

Sylph shoots out her knife winds.

At the same time, Leon Silver moves too.

Chwak, Chwak-

The bastard moves left and right like a flash of lightning and avoids the knife winds.

Kang Chun-seong heads in with a kick, but Leon lays flat to avoid it.

Then he crawls on all fours and approaches me, fast.

I use the Mosin-Nagant and load and aim and pull the trigger.

Tang-pak!

A tree is hit by the bullet.

Then he just comes in with his claws.

“Kuk!”

In my surprise I collapse onto my back. By the skin of my teeth, his claws barely brush over the top of my head.

-Meow!

Sylph shouts as she sends out her knife winds.

Like a ghost, he leaps and escapes them all.

He delicately lands and this time, Leon Silver goes for Hye-su.

“Hye-su!”

I quickly pull the trigger but my inaccurate aim cannot hit the quickly moving bastard.

Hye-su is clenching her jaw and gripping her sword tight. Leon Silver, as if the whole thing is absurd, flippantly smiles.

“I’ll make it comfortable, miss.”

“Ahhhh!”

Hye-su screams and swishes her sword. It’s a pitiful resistance.

Pook!

That second, it was like the world stopped.

In that frozen time, I looked on, blankly, at the scene before my eyes.

It was a dream.

It is a despicable nightmare, four long claws piercing through Hye-su's body to the other side.

“Ku huk!”

Hye-su lets out a moan and lifelessly collapses. Her body falls effortlessly to the ground, and in Hye-su's last moment, she is looking at me. She is looking at me with tears in her sad, sad eyes.

I'm sorry, oppa.

I'm going first.

At last, Hye-su can rest in peace.

“Hye... Hye-su!”

I scream, close to tears.

Leon Silver stares at me in my state. His eyes are laughing. As if he was wanting to see the look of despair on my face.

“Ugh AHH!”

I aim my gun at him and pull the trigger.

Tang!

As the gunshot rings, the bastard easily steps to the side. He is moving out of the way by seeing where the barrel of the gun is pointed.

I pull the bolt and get rid of the shell and shoot again.

It doesn't shoot. I've used all five bullets.

"Eek! Shang!"

I take the bullets out of my pocket and reload. My hand's won't listen to me. They shake and cannot properly grab the bullets and put them into the chamber.

The bastard is looking at me try, and laughs.

Chapter 46 - Return (Part 1)

In a completely empty world, there is nothing but white.

I have come back to this wearisome world full of white.

“You have come, examinee Kim Hyun-ho.”

The baby angel greets me after I come through the exam door.

And maybe he does respect other peoples' feelings because this time he doesn't obnoxiously blow his horn.

I sit down where I was standing.

By coming through the exam door my physical body was completely healed, but not my exhausted mind.

With a forlorn tone of voice, the baby angel speaks.

“You have come alone.”

“...”

I have.

I am alone. There is only person that has returned to this place.

Only I have returned from that hell.

Joon-ho and Hye-su are dead.

I haven't yet seen Kang Chun-seong's death, but seeing as how he did not return, I am positive he has died.

That day, when I lost reason after Hye-su died, the one who rescued me was Kang Chun-seong.

'Go on ahead. I'll take this.'

At those words I had come back to reality.

But how could I escape alone?

I hesitated.

We have to fight together.

But I was no longer any help. The summons time was over and Sylph had gone away.

Kang Chun-seong had already taken his attention away from me. His two eyes were focused only on the strong Leon Silver.

Leon Silver too looked like he had found a new enjoyment in Kang Chun-seong's glare.

“Go. I will see an end to this with this guy and follow after. No matter how long it takes, I will return.”

Like that, I left Kang Chun-seong and ran away.

Regardless of day or night, I ran like mad. Thankfully, my physical strength buff entry level 4 was able to handle it.

The forest ended and when I arrived at a tall and steep mountain, the exam door appeared before me and I stared at it and collapsed onto the floor and sobbed.

Joon-ho, murdered in vain.

Hye-su, looking at me with her sad eyes in her moment of death.

Kang Chun-seong, sending me away and continuing the fight alone.

Now, at the feeling of loneliness in knowing that I am alone, I felt like going crazy. As the team leader, not only did I sacrifice the village people, but I survived by sacrificing all my team members too.

“You look sad.”

At the baby angel’s words, I come back from my flashback.

“But you did clear the exam so congratulations. Congratulations, examinee Kim Hyun-ho. You have gained the highest grade this time as well.”

“ ... ”

“Man, you have no energy, this is no fun.”

The baby angel tried to delicately tease me, but I don’t have the energy to reply.

The baby angel stared at me, then suddenly says.

“Then an energy booster quiz!”

“ ... ”

“When you used Sylph to shoot, how did Leon Silver know which direction the gun was shooting without seeing it?”

At those words my eyes open wide.

Yes, I found that strange too.

How did he know, with what and where, the gun was coming from?

He would not have known Sylph's movements.

Then...

I think deep. And then one answer comes to mind.

“... smell.”

“Correct!”

“God damn it!”

It was smell.

Sylph, of course, has no sound or smell, but not the Mosin-Nagant. We had shot many times, so it must have been the smell of the gunpowder.

‘I was foolish.’

If only I had gotten that.

Using Sylph's power, if I had eliminated the smell and then shot, we might have had a different result.

Because of Joon-ho's death and the bastard's pressure mind games, I had not thought about it clearly.

If only I had done a little better! Then Hye-su wouldn't have had to die!

"I know, huh."

The baby angel retorted after hearing my thoughts.

"If examinee Kim Hyun-ho had done a little better, examinee Lee Hye-su probably wouldn't have died."

"You shit!"

"Hehehe."

I'm furious and glared at him but the baby angel went around in circles and laughed.

"Have you learned a little lesson now?"

"What lesson? That if you're stupid, you die?"

“What do you mean stupid. Examinee Kim Hyun-ho did very well in this exam too. But still.”

The baby angel flapped his wings, flew towards me, and shoved his face into mine.

“But you need to do better than that.”

“ ... ”

“In tense situations, even when close to death, examinee Kim Hyun-ho must be cool-headed and wise. Do you understand? Because I am rooting for you to make it to the end.”

“ ... ”

“Now, now. You should hurry up and go. See you again in the next exam.”

As the baby angel flicks his finger, the exam door appears.

I opened the door and stepped towards the bright light.

And the third exam is over.

The research center is in a panic.

Including Cha Ji-hye, everyone is moving busily.

Lee Joon-ho, Lee Hye-su, Kang Chun-seong, are being pulled from their rooms.

The three of them have died of a heart attack. That is the last step of the those who died in the Arena. But in real life, their bodies are at least whole, which offers a little comfort. At least, here, they look peaceful.

“Are you okay?”

Cha Ji-hye comes to me and asks.

I weakly reply.

“Do I look okay?”

“I’m sorry. It was a useless question.”

“What will happen to Joon-ho and Hye-su now?”

“We are taking them to the hospital. They will be ruled as sudden deaths and we will notify their families.”

“I guess that’s what will happen to me too.”

“If you lose your life in the Arena, yes.”

I can picture it easily.

A scene with my family grabbing my corpse and wailing. To the family, it’s a shock out of the blue.

“Today, return to your family and rest. We can hear your 3rd turn report later when you are mentally recuperated and stable.”

“Okay.”

Cha Ji-hye says a quick farewell and perhaps she is in a rush, because she disappears off to somewhere.

And then, the Yoo Ji-soo team finishes their exam and comes out.

Yoo Ji-soo, Cha Jin-hyuk, Lee Jin-yong.

19th turn, no, now the 20th turn team, all three have safely returned. I envy them.

“Wow! Long time no see! I totally forgot about you! What was your name?”

The dyed-blond Yoo Ji-soo makes a fuss when she sees me.

‘It’s been so long you forgot my name?’

I find her behavior to be strange.

The kind-hearted Lee Ji-yong explains my confusion away.

“You guys are 3rd turn so at the longest, your exam would have been, 2 weeks? We had to clear a 3-month long mission.”

“Oh...”

I spent ten days in Arena. They spent 3 months. And yet to all wake up the same day, it feels odd. That we have returned to the same time but lived a different amount of it.

“Your other members?”

Asks Cha Jin-hyuk.

“... you called it the 2nd and 3rd turn jinx?”

That answer was sufficient.

Yoo Ji-soo and Lee Ji-yong’s faces freeze.

“Damn...”

Cha Jin-hyuk scratches his head.

“Everyone died but you? A team like yours? Impossible! What kind of shit exam was it? That fellow Kang Chun-seong, his skills were incredible!”

Said Yoo Ji-soo, unable to believe it.

“It’s all my fault.”

“Shit, now what. So now you have to clear the exams by yourself?”

“I suppose so.”

Then Lee Ji-yong came to me and patted me on the shoulder.

“Don’t give up because you’re alone. There is a way to get the help of other examinees in nearby areas.”

“Other examinees?”

“Yea, other examinees in nearby area sometimes rescue teams in difficult situations like you. The research center will probably see if there’s a team for your rescue nearby.”

“Or sometimes they just give up on the teams with no prospects too.”

Said Cha Jin-hyuk.

“Hey!”

Scolds Lee Ji-yong.

Cha Jin-hyuk paid no heed and continued.

“Don’t trust the research center too much. These people aren’t a volunteer organization. Even though it seems like they are giving their whole-hearted help for the examinees, they aren’t nice enough to invest labor and resources into a team with no prospects. Even more so for a team like you with all your members dead and a lone 3rd turn rookie.”

“Hey! Stop saying your useless shit!”

Yoo Ji-soo yells angrily at Cha Jin-hyuk.

“I’m just letting him know. He shouldn’t get stabbed in the back a step too late, he should prepare himself.”

Cha Jin-hyuk keeps talking to me.

“Listen carefully, your manager Cha Ji-hye is a sincere woman, but the people above her aren’t like that. She’s in a position where she has to periodically send in her performance reports to the politically powerful above her, so they won’t do anything that will put themselves at a loss. They’ll probably destroy your contract and discard you.”

“ ... ”

“Prepare your heart for it, and no matter what, try your hardest to survive. Before you go home today, ask Cha Ji-hye to give you all the information she has on the Arena. Cause if you get dropped, there’s no way for you to have access to that information.”

Cha Jin-hyuk’s advice is cold but a big help to me.

After hearing it all, it makes sense.

There doesn’t seem to be a good chance for the research center to pour in lots of money, time, and effort into a team, into me, with a high chance of dying.

On top of that, it’s not a long term contract but a 1-year contract, so that’s that much easier to get rid of.

I bow deeply to Cha Jin-hyuk.

“Thank you for your advice.”

“You’re welcome. Go on now.”

“Hold on, wait!”

Yoo Ji-soo grabs me.

She hands me her phone.

“Your number.”

“Excuse me?”

“It’s good to keep in contact with fellow examinees, you know.”

“Oh, yeah.”

I obediently input my number into Yoo Ji-soo’s phone.

She pats me on the shoulder.

“Hang in there. There’s nothing else I can say but that.”

“Thank you.”

With Cha Jin-hyuk's advice, I immediately go to find Cha Ji-hye.

But Cha Ji-hye doesn't seem like crafty woman, so I tell her truthfully.

"Tell me honestly. What are the chances that the research center will continue to support me?"

"..."

Cha Ji-hye's expression grows dark. Indeed, Cha Jin-hyuk was right.

"Please give me all the information you can on the Arena. If it so happens that I no longer receive the help of the research center, I have to keep clearing the exams and live."

"... I cannot definitively say what decision the upper authority will make regarding you. Even though you have a very special main skill, you are now your 3rd turn and have lost all your team members and they'll see that very negatively."

"I understand."

She sighed.

"I will give you all the information I can offer. Even so, I don't

have the high-ranking information, but it will be better than nothing.”

Cha Ji-hye took out her notebook and started it and moved some files over to a USB and handed it to me.

“For now, take this. Regardless of what the research center decides, I will continue contact with you and do my best to help you.”

“Thank you.”

“No. As your research center manager, it was my insufficiency that produced this result. I can only say sorry.”

At times she is impudent but I can tell Cha Ji-hye is a sincere person.

I say goodbye and get on the helicopter and then the car and arrive back in Cheonan.

The time passed in the real world time has only been a day, but I feel as if I haven't been home in years.

Chapter 47 - Special Skill (Part 1)

I come home and everyone is out.

This is actually better. I needed the time to quietly calm myself down.

I take out this and that for side dishes and eat when suddenly my phone rings. I've gotten a text from someone I don't know.

[Among the assist skills, there is a special skill, get that first.
From the pretty Ji-soo noona <3]

It's Yoo Ji-soo. Contacting me to give my advice, I am thankful. I'm not sure about the pretty part though.

'Now that I think about it, I haven't checked to see how much karma I got.'

I summon my board.

-Name: Kim Hyun-ho

-Class: 7

-Karma: +1300

-Mission: rest until the next exam.

-Time limit: 19 days 16 hours

-You may receive your karma prize. To receive the prize, summon your board and say 'karma prize.'

I'm completely surprised. I've jumped two classes and earned an incredible 1300 karma.

I earned 900 karma on the 2nd turn, and even then that was the highest grade for that turn.

But this time, it's 400 more than that.

'Then again, I did play a big role.'

I eliminated 12 lycanthropes and personally threatened the village leader to win over the villagers. The one who led the results was definitely me.

'I basically killed all my teammates...'

I laugh bitterly.

What a superb score for a team leader that obliterated his whole team.

Anyway, I decided to retrieve my karma prize.

‘She said to get the special skill.’

Since it is the advice of a 19th, no, 20th, turn veteran examinee, Yoo Ji-soo, I think that she has a point.

But for now, I decided to first get the opinion of Cha Ji-hye.

I don’t know how my future with the Korean Arena research center will be going forward, but as of now I am still contracted. By contract, Cha Ji-hye is my manager and I cannot just use my karma without consulting her beforehand.

I send a text to Cha Ji-hye.

[Me: I am intending to choose my karma prize. I heard that I should first get the special skill, is this true?]

Ring.

A reply comes quickly. She is indeed diligent.

[Cha Ji-hye: How much karma did you receive?]

[Me: 1100]

I lower it a little. I don't think I should reveal it all since I don't know how my relationship with them will be going forward.

[Cha Ji-hye: You really received a lot. Then getting the special skill first is correct. Please get your special skill first and then contact me again.]

[Me: Okay.]

I speak to my board.

“Karma prize.”

-Please select a prize.

Skill: gain a capability.

Item: gain a weapon, shield, or other item.

Other: turn an object from the world into an item. Something that has been turned into an item can be carried into the exam.

-Remaining karma: 1300

“Skill.”

-Please select a skill.

Main skill: a basic capability needed for performing the exam. As the most important skill in determining an examinee's competence, only one selection is possible.

Assist skill: a skill that aids the examinee in addition to the main skill, according to conditions, can be selected.

-Remaining karma: 1300

“Assist skill.”

Then a whole list of assist skills I can learn appears.

There are all kinds of assist skills, and I keep flipping through them when I discover the special skill.

??? (Special skill): The special skill is determined by the examinee's constitution and propensity. Only one special skill may be selected. It is unknown what skill will manifest and it cannot be cancelled or changed. (-300)

I don't know what the skill will be.

So, I can get a good skill or I can get a completely useless one.

I hesitate a moment but Yoo Ji-soo and Cha Ji-hye both said to get this first, so I decide to follow their advice.

“Select special skill.”

Pat!

A light shone from the board and seeps into me.

Then, some words appear on the board.

-You have acquired the ‘skill synthesis’ special skill.

-Skill synthesis (special skill): A ‘skill’ and ‘skill’ or ‘skill’ and ‘item’ that you possess can be joined to create a new skill. Retrieve the board and say ‘skill select.’

*An item that is used for the synthesis will be consumed.

*A skill that is created through the skill synthesis cannot be used for synthesis.

-Remaining karma: 1000

‘Skill synthesis?’

I think it’s a skill where I can put together skills I already have to make a new skill.

‘So in other words, it means I can gain a new skill without using karma?’

Acquiring a new assist skill costs at least 100 karma. But a skill made through the skill synthesis is free.

This is actually a great benefit!

‘What a great skill! So this is why they said to get this first.’

Seeing is believing.

I decide to try out this skill synthesis.

I speak to the board.

“Skill synthesis.”

And the words on the board change.

-Select the skill or item for synthesis.

Possible skills for synthesis: spirit summons (Sylph), physical buffer, direction GPS

Possible items for synthesis: Mosin-Nagant, item bag

Using an item for synthesis gets rid of it so I must not use those. I should synthesize skill and skill.

There's no need to think this one through. I'll synthesize them together in order.

“Synthesize spirit summons and physical buffer.”

-Spirit summons (Sylph) and physical buffer are being synthesized.

Pat!

A white light twinkles from the board and then it gets sucked into my body. It's a sight similar to when I acquire a skill with a karma prize.

-Synthesis successful. You have acquired the divine protection of wind (synthesis skill).

-Divine protection of wind (synthesis skill): stir up wind with your body. It is influenced by the user's concentration and skill level along with the spirit's skill level.

*Entry level 1: time duration 15 minutes. Cool time 1 hour.

‘Whoa...’

I can't stifle my surprise.

I can't believe I got such a great skill for free. I can gather what an impressive special skill I just got.

‘Let's keep synthesizing.’

“Synthesize spirit summons and direction GPS.”

-Spirit summons (Sylph) and direction GPS have been synthesized.

-Synthesis failed.

‘A fail...’

I guess not everything can get synthesized together.

I continue and try to synthesize the physical buffer with direction GPS.

Pat!

This time, a success.

-Synthesis successful. You have acquired athleticism (synthesis skill).

-Athleticism (synthesis skill): improved reflexes and movement.

*Entry level 1

As it states, reflexes. Turning physical condition and direction into reflexes, this is fun. Does it tell me where and how to move my body?

I've been told I am clumsy since I was young so this is a particularly good skill for me. In addition, this skill isn't used but is a skill that is permanent and continuous like the physical strength buff.

‘With the wind protection and reflexes, I should be okay fighting in close range now.’

I am a physical buffer entry level 4. It’s a strong body like that of a marine.

But I am that much of a klutz that even with this good of a body I got one-sidedly beat the shit out of by Cha Ji-hye in sparring. Even though there is the point of her being trained.

But this new athleticism covers that weakness of mine.

I can use the divine protection of the wind so while Sylph does the long distance shooting with the gun, I can fight in close combat.

I am deep in thought like so when I get a phone call from Cha Ji-hye.

‘Oh right. Didn’t she say to call after getting the special skill?’

I pick up the phone.

“Hello?”

-How is the special skill?

After a quick pause, I decide to lie.

“I received a skill called the divine protection of spirit. I think the skill, it’s like getting strength from the spirit.

-Really? That’s neither here nor there. It would have been good to get something better.

Cha Ji-hye is disappointed.

“I thought this much would be good, is there a special skill that’s better?”

-Special skills are all special to each examinee so there is no repetition of skills. Another examinee I know had a most special skill, and it was a revival.

“Re, revival?”

-It was a skill for reviving at the cost of 300 karma. That’s why I am disappointed. I wanted you to gain a special skill just as powerful to overcome your obstacles.

“...well. It is what it is. Isn’t this pretty good, though? When Sylph’s summons time is up, I can still call the wind to help.”

-I did not say that was bad. Then we should think about spending your karma prize around your special skill. You have 800 karma

left, correct?

“Yes.”

-Then first, we should invest in your main skill, your spirit.

“The spirit? Didn’t you say there’s not much point in increasing the main skill level in the beginning?”

-We are not raising the level.

Cha Ji-hye cuts in.

-I have heard that you can work with two spirits, Sylph and Kasa, Is that correct?

“Oh, yeah.”

-Acquire the fire spirit, Kasa. Then in an emergency you can call summon both spirits, Sylph and Kasa, into the fight, and the option for your spirit divine protection special skill will increase as well. How about it?

Sounds like a good idea.

If I get Kasa and use it as an ingredient for the skill synthesis, would I get the divine protection of fire like I did for wind?

“That sounds like a good idea. I’ll do that.”

-And we have to use your remaining 400 karma to reinforce your close combat ability. Hmm, for now, increase your physical buffer to entry level 5 with 300 karma, and the remaining 100 karma to gain another assist skill would be good.

“Which assist skill?”

-The combat and acceleration are good. Whatever it is, we have to use it to train you in a martial arts and overcome your clumsiness.

“...well, then, yeah, let’s do that.”

This woman too thinks I am clumsy. Meh, it’s an accurate observation.

Even though I don’t need those because I acquired the athleticism skill.

-And I am still in discussions with upper management at the research center regarding your situation. I am doing my best so please do not despair too much and wait.

“Yes, thank you.”

-No need. Well then...

“Yes.”

I end the call and as she said, I raised my physical buffer to entry level 5. I used 300 karma to increase my level and my body gets even harder.

All around my body the detailed muscles grow harder and seeing it, I can't help but be awed.

Would it be believable if I stood on my finger?

My physique is incredible enough to do those cartoonish acts.

It really is true that entry level 5 is the limit for the human body.

I continued and spoke to the board.

“Show me main skills.”

-Examinee Kim Hyun-ho currently has spirit summons entry level 1.

-Spirit summons (main skill): summon the lower level wind spirit. You may summon by saying ‘Sylph.’

*Entry level 1: summons time 2 hours. Time counts down when Sylph's power is used.

*Entry level 2: summons time 2 hours and 15 minutes. (-500)

Raising the level to entry level 2 costs 500 karma and even at that, the summons time only increases by 15 minutes. It's too inefficient.

Like Cha Ji-hye said, raising the main skill level in the beginning is a waste of karma.

It is definitely better to get the fire spirit, Kasa, than it is to increase a level.

"I will make a contract with Kasa."

Chapter 48 - Special Skill (Part 2)

-Spirit summons (main skill): summon a spirit and use the power of mother nature.

*Possible summons spirits: Sylph, Kasa

*Entry level 1: summons time 2 hours

Reading the description on the board, I can see that I have made the contract with Kasa. I decide to summon it.

“Kasa.”

Hwaluluk-

A flame suddenly bobs up and down in front my eyes and the flame balls up and appears into one shape. The completed appearance is...

-Hek hek hek...!

A small animal pants with its tongue out. And a tail ferociously wagged left and right.

It's a puppy.

Appearing from the body that was ablaze, a puppy that looks like a Yorkshire terrier looks at me and greets me with its wagging tail.

“Ha...”

I sigh.

A dog after a cat. I was hoping it would be a spirit I could talk with.

-Bark bark!

The dog looks at me and barks. With shiny wide eyes he looks at me and I laugh.

“Alright, alright, come here.”

-Bark!

Kasa jumps into my lap.

‘Hold up.’

The summons time is still 2 hours.

If I have Kasa summoned with Sylph, does the time run out twice as fast?

I should test this out.

“Sylph!”

-Meow!

This time, a slender kitty appears and delicately sits on top of my head.

-Meow?

-Ruff?

Sylph and Kasa look at each other suspiciously. They exchanged looks like who are you...

Sylph taps Kasa on the head with her front paw.

Kasa is momentarily alarmed and growls and bares his teeth. Sylph too lowers her body and assumed a fighting position.

-Bark, bark, bark!

-Meow!

Kasa jumped up from my lap and gets entangled with Sylph. I see the two spirits tossing and turning above my head and sigh once more.

What a mess.

At least them quarreling doesn't use more summons time.

While the cat and dog argue, I look at my board.

*Entry level 1: summons time 2 hours. (1 hour 58 minutes 23 seconds)

As expected, the summons time goes by twice as fast.

Summoning both spirits is a waste. They don't look to be on good terms anyway, so unless it is an emergency situation, I should only summon one.

Since Sylph always does the scouting and sniping, I'll use her more.

"Kasa, return."

-Ggung (whimper).

In the midst of fighting, Kasa makes a sorrowful sound. I scratch his head and persuade him.

“I’ll summon you again and next time we can play.”

-Bark!

As if in understanding, he barks one more time and disappears.

“Sylph, please gather all the dust in the house and put it in the trash.”

Sylph turns into one stream of wind and flies by every nook and cranny.

One disgusting clump of half dust and half hair gets thrown in the trash. A house with three women, there is no end to the hair.

I return Sylph too and keep staring at my board.

I still have something left to do.

“Skill synthesis.”

The words on the board change.

-Please select the skill or item you wish to synthesize.

Possible skills for synthesis: spirit summons (Sylph), spirit summons (Kasa), physical buffer, direction GPS

Possible items for synthesis: Mosin-Nagant, item bag

*An item that is used for synthesis is consumed.

A skill option for possible synthesis has increased by one.

“Synthesize spirit summons Kasa with physical buffer.”

-Spirit summons (Kasa) and physical buffer are being synthesized.

Pat!

And a light twinkled from the board.

-Synthesis successful. You have acquired the divine protection of flame (synthesis skill).

-Divine protection of flame (synthesis skill): stir up flame with your body. It is influenced by the user's concentration and skill

level plus the spirit's skill level.

*Entry level 1: time duration 15 minutes. Cooldown time 1 hour.

A success. In addition to wind, I have gotten the skill for flame. For free.

‘It’s a big dangerous inside the house so I’ll test it out later at the mountain.’

I decide to test out the divine protection of wind and divine protection of flame on Taejo mountain at dawn.

Now, I have 300 karma left. How to use it?

Cha Ji-hye recommended getting a martial arts related assist skill and learning to fight.

But because I have the athleticism from the synthesis skill, I think that will be sufficient.

Martial arts is, in the end, moving the body with precision, so there shouldn’t be a need to acquire an additional martial arts skill in addition to the athleticism, right?

After thinking it through carefully, I postpone my decision.

‘I’ll think it through a bit more before deciding.’

I still have 20 days before the next exam. For today, I’ll test out the new skills one by one and think some more.

The time is just past 5 pm and Hyun-ji is getting in from school.

But she’s not alone.

“Oppa!”

A girl with long straight hair and double eyelids waves a cheerful hand and runs at me. It’s Yoo Min-jeong.

“Aw, oppa! Didn’t you miss me?”

Without any hesitation, Min-jeong hugs me.

“I missed you. Of course I wanted to see you.”

I hug Min-jeong back and with reply with my greasiest voice possible,

“Hey, you guys! Getting along real well!”

Seeing this, Hyun-ji yells in anger and Min-jeong and I giggle.

“Separate, you two!”

“I want to separate too but...”

Min-jeong’s eyes twinkle as she talks.

“His strong chest won’t let me go. I can’t separate myself.”

I burst into laughter.

It’s a parody of the situation with Hyun-ji at the club.

Eventually, Min-jeong gets dragged off by the ear from Hyun-ji.

“Anyway, what are you doing at our house?”

“We have a group project. And I wanted to see you.”

Min-jeong hits on me again and gets a low kick from Hyun-ji.

“Give me food.”

Says Min-jeong to Hyun-ji.

Hyun-ji looks surprised.

“What do you mean food? Just finish the project and go.”

“Aw, but its dinner time. I can’t think right when I’m hungry.”

“Are you hungry 24 hours a day, 365 days a year?”

“Aww, come on.”

“Who are trying to act cute with?”

Min-jeong continues to nag to be fed and eventually Hyun-ji stares at me.

“Oppa, food.”

“...”

“Make some food while we work on our project. You can do that much for your baby sis that’s getting ready for employment, right? Haha, thanks a bunch.”

Hyun-ji goes into her room with Min-jeong. Min-jeong blew a kiss as she went in.

“Food that you personally prepare, I look forward to it.”

“...”

Soon after, I can hear the two girls chatting away from their room. Their voices are cheerful and animated, and it doesn't seem like they're talking about school.

‘I guess I'll cook.’

I sigh and head into the kitchen.

Since there is a guest, I guess I can't just take out whatever?

I search the fridge for something tasty and discover a tenderloin steak.

I put three pieces of meat on the frying pan and grill them when I suddenly think of Kasa.

‘Should I ask the fire spirit to cook it?’

“Kasa.”

-Hek hek hek! (panting sound)

Kasa appears, excited to see me. I put my finger to my mouth and tell him to quiet down. Kasa nods his head.

“Can you cook this meat for me? Not all the way, just barely raw.”

Kasa nods his head and makes three tiny balls of flame and shoot them at the frying pan. The balls of flame absorb into the meat.

Hwa lu luk!

I turn the fire off the gas range and slightly cut the meat with scissors to see how done it is.

‘Huk!’

It’s surprising how well cooked it is.

The inside of the meat is cooked softly, the juices held in just as is. More than anything, this took an instant. This will be really beneficial when hunting and cooking.

I set the table and call Hyun-ji and Min-jeong.

“It’s so tasty, oppa. I think I’m falling for you.”

“Stop hitting on him.”

It was a pleasant meal, with Min-jeong’s joking and Hyun-ji’s bickering. Min-jeong and I repeatedly exchanged expressions of affection, but we just kid and she doesn’t seem to sincerely like me either.

By the time Min-jeong heads home it’s nearly 10 pm.

“I’m going. You’ll do the presenting?”

“Alright, bitch. I’m not seeing you out, yeah?”

“Aw no, won’t you escort me to the bus stop? It’s gotten so dark and Min-jeong is scared.”

“What did I say about the acting cutesy? It’s annoying, get on home.”

Hyun-ji shoos her away as if shooing away a fly. Min-jeong pouts her lips and then looks at me.

“Oppaaaaa~.”

“Huh?”

“Min-jeong is so scared. I wish a strong man with abs would escort me...”

“Poor you. I guess I have to take you. Let’s go.”

“Gyak, oppa, you’re the coolest!”

Hyun-ji looks at us chatting and giggling and her eyes raise up and go cold.

“Oh? I said don’t make a something-something between you!”

“Oppa, let’s hurry!”

Min-jeong blatantly hooks her arm into mine. I become her escort and head out of the house. We leave Hyun-ji in a wild rage and get onto the elevator together.

We’re in the elevator and going down and our arms are still linked.

Min-jeong suddenly asks me.

“Oppa, what are you thinking about?”

“Timing when to unlink our arms.”

Min-jeong giggles.

“Oppa, I think you’re hella funny.”

“I’ve heard that a lot. I’ve never meant to be funny but people keep saying I am.”

Every time I talk, Min-jeong laughs out loud. Just seeing her react so well to me, a man can easily be swayed.

The way she acts with guys, I can see how she is friends with Hyun-ji.

“Oppa, lower your speech.”

“Okay. You want to too?”

“I don’t want to.”

“Why?”

“Cause then I’ll just be like a close younger sister.”

Yoo Min-jeong says that and makes a captivating smile.

For a moment, I think my heart will stop. I had to try my hardest not to show it. Whether she knows this or not, she just continues

to be happy go lucky.

‘I can’t fall for it.’

Min-jeong is just half-jokingly hitting on me.

If I fall for it, I’ll just be a fool.

Thank goodness the elevator doors open up and I smoothly take out my arm.

“Shall we go?”

“Okay.”

We come out the apartment and head towards the bus stop.

Suddenly, at the apartment’s front parking lot, some men in black suits appear.

‘What is this?’

They kind of look like the gangsters from a third rate movie.

Anyway, I don’t feel good about it and walk faster. Min-jeong must feel uneasy about it too because she walks faster too.

But the men come towards us.

They clearly have some business with us.

‘No, maybe they have something to do with me.’

It’s not some cheap gangster movie, there’s no way they suddenly appear in groups and just harass a passing man and woman.

To do such a thing, the suits and shoes of the men look too fancy.

‘Are they from the Korean Arena research center?’

From their attire and disciplined walking, they look like they are with some formal organization.

They keep coming towards us but they don’t call to us or say anything.

They are sending me some kind of message. To send the girl off and meet in private.

I talk to Min-jeong.

“Min-jeong, you can go on your own now, right?”

“Op, oppa.”

“Go on.”

“No, I can’t. Oppa, let’s go together”

Min-jeong looks frightened. I think she thinks I’m going to fight them.

“It’s okay. Don’t worry about me.”

“Should I call the cops?”

“No, there won’t be a need for that.”

Min-jeong hesitates and I gently push on her back.

“Okay, go home. There’s no need to worry.”

“I’ll call you. Be careful.”

“I will. Get home safe.”

Min-jeong looked back a couple times and then dashed off.

Then I turned around and looked to the men.

Chapter 49 - Chairman Park Jin-Seong (Part 1)

“What is it?”

I say first.

To show I am not cowering, I come out strong but in reality I am not fearful.

The men come closer to me but I don't bat an eye. If I wanted, I have the means to kill them without a trace.

And practically speaking, there's no chance of just brazenly committing a crime in the middle of the street.

Among the men, a sharp-looking middle aged man walks out as the representative and bows his head to me.

“Hello. I apologize for coming around unannounced.”

“Are you from the research center?”

“No.”

The middle-aged man hands me his business card.

Jin-seong Electronics, 3rd Chief Presidential Secretary, Lee Jung-shik.

I'm completely surprised.

Jin-seong Electronics is a leading conglomerate in Korean with the highest sales of the country's businesses.

"I assume you've come knowing who I am?"

"Yes."

"Did you get my details from the research center? That's a bit off putting."

"I do apologize for that. But this isn't something that is all that bad for you so I hope you are not too offended by it."

"I'll decide whether I get offended or not, but first, tell me what it is you want."

"Could you come with us, please?"

"Tell me what it is first."

"I think that's best if you heard it directly from the chairman."

Chairman?

Does he mean, no way, the head of Jin-seong Group, Chairman Park Jin-seong?

What would this country's greatest millionaire want with me?

Even though I am an examinee, it's not like there's only one or two of us in the country. And amongst them, I am only a third exam rookie.

This only grows my suspicions of these men even stronger. I feel tense, thinking maybe they are lying.

"I don't want to have a conversation after getting dragged somewhere in the middle of the night like this. That's too one sided."

"But the chairman is calling."

"You're not talking about the chairman Park Jin-seong of the Jin-seong group, are you?"

"That is him."

"..."

I'm at a loss for words.

‘That man is calling on me?’

It makes no sense.

I'm really feeling uneasy about who these guys are now. It might be a sinister organization that plans on using me, an examinee, by luring me into a trap.

Who is to know that they won't kidnap me, then threaten my life in exchange for me bringing them back majeong from Arena?

When I am called into the Arena and doing my exam, my body in real life is asleep.

If in the real world, my life is being threatened, there is no choice but to do as they want.

I speak.

“This doesn't seem appropriate. I would like to meet in the bright of day in a location I am familiar with. I am suspicious of you saying you are from Jin-seong Group, and it's so unbelievable that Chairman Park Jin-seong would want to meet me that this all almost seems ridiculous.”

“If you would come with us, you'd see. We are in a position

where we have to follow the chairman's orders as well, so please understand."

"Sorry about that, but that is your position."

"If you come out like this, it complicates matters."

Chief secretary Yoo Jung-shik's voice turns a little domineering.

I follow his lead and fiercely stare back.

"So what? You'll kidnap me?"

"... well, of course not."

"And? What, if someone calls, I just have to go?"

"..."

"Do you not know who I am? Don't you know what an examinee is?"

"I am well aware."

"So what are you relying on in behaving like this? You want to get killed without a sound?"

“I apologize for offending you so. We have been polite and respectful...”

Yoo Jung-shik returns to his former demeanor.

“Then politely screw off. Well then.”

I quickly turn home.

But as I do, the other men stand and block my way. Like professional instinct (like they’ve done it before, its part of their job).

And I instinctively punch.

Puk!

“Kuk!”

One of the guys grabs his chin and falls down.

I kick the other guy in the shin and he stumbles.

“Kuk!”

The shin-kicked guy loses his balance and falls down too.

I'm surprised at myself.

My fist and foot naturally extended themselves. I felt no awkwardness in my movements when I attacked the two men.

‘The effect of reflexes!’

Its proof of the effects of the reflexes I gained from the skill synthesis.

I casually make my way through the both of them.

Then, I hear the hasty voice of Yoo Jun-shik behind my back.

“Then when should we return for you?”

“Tell the punk to come himself!”

I yell rudely and return home.

There is a reason I came off like that.

‘Because the other side was on the offense too.’

If they know where I live, they must know my contact information. Even so, they didn't contact me first and just showed up out the blue. Then they say I have to go with them. That was their plan all along to have me just go along with it.

That's why I roughly refused and when they blocked my way, as if I was waiting for it, beat them and came out on top. It should be enough of a warning to them that I cannot be had so easily.

**

Yoo Min-jeong was hiding in the side of the street with just her head poking out, watching the whole thing.

In one hand, Min-jeong was holding a smartphone with the [number 112](#) already up on her screen, ready to press call at any moment.

(TN: Number for the police in Korea)

He is her best friend's real oppa and not knowing what might happen to him, it turns out she wasn't so disloyal as to abandon him and save herself.

But watching it all in secret, an unbelievable scene unfolds itself and Min-jeong's face is in a daze.

‘Jin-seong Group? Chairman?’

People that say they are from Jin-seong Electronics.

But really, their neat clothes and shoes and hair, the men look elite, not like some good-for-nothings.

People like that came to respectfully escort Kim Hyun-ho.

Saying that the chairman is calling. There is no doubt that that chairman means chairman Park Jin-seong.

And an even more surprising scene followed.

Kim Hyun-ho fell them down like a bolt of lightning.

Then he called the legendary chairman Park Jin-seong ‘that punk’ and left and the other men couldn’t stop him.

‘What kind of man is Hyun-ho oppa really?’

Min-jeong was suspicious.

From what she heard from Hyun-ji, he is a pitiful man whose life revolved around the civil exam and belatedly returned home.

But when she really saw him in person at the club, he was unlike what she had pictured him to be, bold and confident and it was refreshing to see.

But this Hyun-ho she just saw is shocking.

What kind of person is he that people from Jin-seong Group had difficulty dealing with him, and chairman Park Jin-seong is calling him?

‘What the hell? Who is Hyun-ho oppa?’

The inside of Min-jeong’s head was full of Kim Hyun-ho.

An important man that the Jin-seong Group is looking for.

A bold attitude with no fear.

With a strong body he suppressed two men in the blink of an eye.

Min-jeong felt her heart pounding. She’s seen more than a fair share of men saying they’re the best, but she’s never met a guy like Kim Hyun-ho.

Min-jeong stares at her smartphone.

She cancelled the 112 dial screen and instead, opened up the messaging screen.

“Why are you coming back so late?”

I come home and Hyun-ji stares at me coldly and fiercely.

“Why do you think?”

“Eek! What? What did you do?”

“Spring has come for your oppa!”

“You wanna die? Didn’t I say Min-jeong is off limits?!”

“La la la~ what an enjoyable life~”

“Kyak! I can’t take it! Don’t you know what kind of girl she is, get your head on straight!”

After teasing Hyun-ji plenty, I go into my room.

Zing.

My smartphone vibrates. It’s probably a text from Min-jeong. But of course.

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Oppa, did you get home safe?]

[Me: Yep^^ Did you worry about me?]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Of course I did. I hesitated so long about whether to call the police or not πππ]

I felt good hearing that she worried about me. There's no way to not feel good that a pretty girl was worried about me.

[Me: Haha I told you it wouldn't be anything.]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Who were those people?]

[Me: I don't know. They came looking for the wrong person. We just parted way uneventfully.]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: That's such a relief πππ I was so anxious worrying about you]

[Me: Thanks for worrying about me^^]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Oppa, what are you doing tomorrow?]

[Me: Tomorrow I have a meeting with a friend. Why?]

Those people may come back for me tomorrow so I reply like this.

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: I said I'd treat you to a meal. Do you have time Friday evening?]

‘Oh?’

No matter how I look at it, this is a date.

I didn't know she would actually ask me out and not just poke as a joke.

‘What do I do?’

[Me: Friday evening?]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Yea]

[Me: Sorry. I don't know what is happening that day.]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Oh...]

[Me: I'll let you know when will work.]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Okay^^]

I'm sure she got it.

I put down my smartphone and collapse into bed.

I was somewhat interested in Min-jeong but it was nothing sincere.

She is Hyun-ji's best friend and it would be uncomfortable to casually go about it.

More than that, I am not in the mindset for it.

Joon-ho, Hye-su, Kang Chun-seong...

I sacrificed three people and returned home alone.

How could I return to reality and think to meet a woman and live and enjoy a sweet life.

At this time, won't Jun-ho and Hye-su's families be sobbing at the random tragedy that has struck them?

I bury my body in my blankets and close my eyes.

I have decided to test out my new skills at night on the mountain but I don't have the will. I think I'll just rest tonight.

The next morning, I quickly wash up as soon as I wake up and go on a hike. I jog at a quick pace up the longest hiking course.

Currently with the physical buffer entry level 5 at the limits of human physicality, this kind of exercise actually does nothing. But I do it to keep myself from growing idle.

I only pause for a moment at the top of the hike and immediately turn around and come back down.

But when I get to the start of the hiking trail, there are people waiting for me.

A [black Benz](#) is parked far away and the men in black suits from yesterday are waiting for me.

(TN: A Mercedes Benz is very rare in Korea. It shows just how incredibly rich he is.)

And a familiar looking old man from the news is slowly coming towards me.

The old man looks like a good person and smiles at me.

“Haha, hello?”

“... Hello.”

I begrudgingly reply. I'm completely taken by surprise.

‘For real, its Chairman Park Jin-seong?!’

I for sure had yelled ‘tell the punk to come himself’ last night.

So he really came?!

Chairman park Jin-seong smiles as he talks.

“I apologize for yesterday. That was not my intention.”

“That is alright. My behavior wasn’t good either. It was just so unbelievable...”

“Can you believe it now?”

“Yes.”

Chairman Park Jin-seong has come himself, how could I not believe it.

“What about breakfast?”

“Not yet...”

“Oh good. Let’s go together.”

“Yes.”

I get into the backseat of the Benz with chairman Park Jin-seong.

With a smooth engine sound, we depart together.

Chairman Park Jin-seong is next to me, wearing a leisurely expression.

Chapter 50 - Chairman Park Jin-Seong (Part 2)

“We are going to my mountain cabin in Chonchon county, how does that sound? It’s a small summer house in the backwoods so there aren’t any people.”

Asked chairman Park Jin-seong.

I nod my head.

“Yes, if it is with you.”

“Haha, and why is that?”

“Excuse me, but because if need be, you will be the hostage.”

At my words, chairman Park Jin-seong laughs aloud.

“You are a clever fellow. I like that.”

“It’s an honor.”

The guys in the driver and passenger seats must not like that, because they look uncomfortable.

The car takes the south road for about an hour when we arrive at our destination.

We come to a narrow mountain road in the city of Jincheon-gun in Chungbuk and stop at its end where the summer house is.

The guys up front got out first and open our doors.

“This is my summer home.”

Surprisingly, it’s an average summer home. He is the chairman of a large corporation so I was expecting some grandeur.

“Why did you build a summer home in a place like this?”

I ask out of curiosity.

Chairman Park Jin-seong just smiles.

“It’s a hunting preserve. And right now is the hunting season.”

“Oh...”

“Even up to last year, I would come every year and spend a few days hunting. I thought I wouldn’t be able to make it this year.”

With a happy face, chairman Park Jin-seong heads towards the

house.

From the house, another man, about the same age as the chairman, comes out. He is an older man with an adequate build for maintaining the summer house.

Chairman Park Jin-seong opens his arms wide and speaks.

“I’ve come again, my friend.”

“Oh my, chairman!”

“What chairman. Just call me by name, I said.”

The groundskeeper rushes towards chairman Park Jin-seong for an embrace.

“Chairman! I thought you couldn’t come this year and I was worried.”

“Tsk, you heard about that too?”

“Yes. I worried so much after I heard.”

“You must’ve heard it from my son. It’s always the case, you must go when it is time, don’t worry.”

“Hu hu huk (crying sound)...”

“Aigoo, why are you crying, friend? Prepare for hunting.”

“Yes, yes.”

The old groundskeeper headed inside, and chairman Park Jin-seong looked to me and asks.

“Do you know how to hunt?”

“Yes.”

“We can do breakfast casually while we hunt. How about it?”

“That is not a problem.”

That’s all I did in the Arena.

The old groundskeeper comes out with rucksack stuffed full of something, two rifles, and a good-sized shepherd dog. It looks to be a trained hunting dog.

I take over the rucksack and it is pretty heavy.

When chairman Park Jin-seong hands over one of the shotguns to me, I shake my head.

“I have my own gun.”

“Oh, indeed?”

Chairman Park Jin-seong takes his rifle and ammunition, and the German shepherd's leash, and heads out to hunt. He halts the guys who want to follow along.

“We will go just the two of us, so stay here until I call for you.”

“Yes, chairman.”

“Okay, let's go.”

“Yes.”

And like that, we began hunting.

The richest man in South Korea, the protagonist to the greatest success story, chairman Park Jin-seong, hunting, just the two of us.

Looking at chairman Park Jin-seong who is trekking hard up the mountainside, I am overcome by an odd feeling.

“You seem tired, will you be alright?”

Chairman Park Jin-seong sits on a rock and catches his breath.

“My body is broken now so this is what happens from a little hike. Tsk, I was lively even up to last year, this is just the end.”

Chairman Park Jin-seong’s face shows signs of lonely regret.

Seeing that, only one thought crosses my mind.

That conversation with the groundskeeper earlier, and chairman Park Jin-seong’s request...

“The business you have with me, it’s about that as well, isn’t it?”

Chairman Park Jin-seong grins.

“You are indeed clever.”

“Not really.”

It’s probably a terminal disease.

To overcome a disease that cannot be treated with modern medicine, the final method, he has chosen the Arena.

He is invested enough in this method that he has come to see me, a rookie examinee, personally. He probably has the information that I have a main skill very different from everyone else.

“Now that no one else is here, would you mind showing me your gun? I would like to see it.”

“Yes, weapon!”

The Mosin-Nagant appears and I grasp it in my right hand. Perhaps chairman Park Jin-seong has met many other examinees and is used to it, because he doesn't look a bit surprised.

Instead, chairman Park Jin-seong, when he sees my Mosin-Nagant, his eyes that had been drowning in anxiety, suddenly liven up.

“Wow, that's a Soviet Union gun! Let me see!”

As I hand over the gun, chairman Park Jin-seong becomes like a kid getting a present.

“Wow, it looks nice. Even though this thing is older than I am.”

“Do you know guns?”

“Of course! I'm a huge gun maniac. I started hunting because I loved to shoot. I've collected a lot of rifles and revolvers at my

California summer house. I have a Russian and Finnish Mosin-Nagant too.”

Guns must indeed be a man thing.

Chairman Park Jin-seong inspects and touches the gun all over.

“But did you not have enough Karma, is that why you are using this old-fashioned gun?”

“Yes.”

“You should hurry and gather enough karma and switch to an automatic.”

“I would like to do that too.”

“Haha, anyway, what should we do? My body condition is worse than I thought so I don’t think we’ll be able to hunt. Darn, I really wanted to shoot...”

“Then we’ll hunt quickly. Will you be able to walk an hour or two?”

“That much. You think it’s possible?”

“Yes. Sylph!”

-Meow?

As Sylph is summoned, chairman Park Jin-seong's eyes grow wide.

“What is that?”

“It's a spirit.”

“Spirit? Ah, a spirit summons? That's why they said you have a special main skill.”

“Yes.”

I order to Sylph.

“Tell me where the closest living animal is, please.”

Sylph nods her head and quickly disappears. A moment later, Sylph returns and points to the left with her front paw. Then she draws a number 174 into the ground.

“Is it a rabbit?”

Sylph shakes her head.

“Deer? An elk?”

Sylph keeps shaking her head.

“Wild boar?”

Then, Sylph nods her head.

I speak to chairman Park Jin-seong.

“She says it’s a wild boar. Let’s go.”

“Okay.”

We walk together and chairman Park Jin-seong continues to stare at Sylph, perpetually interested.

I give Sylph another order.

“Get rid of all our smells and noise.”

-Meow.

From then on, our footsteps couldn’t be heard.

Chairman Park Jin-seong is even more amazed.

Then Sylph points to the front.

I look ahead, hiding my body behind a thick bush, and I see a wild boar. He's a rather big bastard, and he hasn't caught on to our being there.

"Would you like to shoot?"

"I would. Leave it to me."

Chairman Park Jin-seong aims for the wild boar with his rifle. Just in case, I aim my Mosin-Nagant on it too. If chairman Park Jin-seong misses his shot, my plan is to shoot the boar before it has a chance to run away.

But I didn't need to.

Puk!

The rifle goes off and blood explodes from the boar's thigh. Due to Sylph's noise elimination, the shot made no sound.

To the faltering boar, chairman Park Jin-seong sends another shot.

Puk!

This time, the body.

The wild boar died just like that.

“Yeah haha! We did it!”

Chairman Park Jin-seong is so ecstatic he could jump. He didn't know that he was still capable of hunting in his dying from a disease body.

“That hunting could be this easy, a spirit is incredible.”

“Yes, it is incredible, Sylph sure is.”

At my compliment, Sylph taps my cheek with her tail and plays aegyo.

“Damn, I don't think we'll even need the sandwiches we brought. How about this for our meal? The summer house old man is really good at cooking this kind of stuff.”

“Let's.”

“Hold on a second. I'll call my guys to come fetch this boar.”

“No, I can just take it.”

“Huh? This big of a boar?”

I approach the dead wild boar. I grab its back legs and chuck it over my back. This several hundred-kilogram wild boar is lifted effortlessly. Thanks to the physical strength buff entry level 5.

“You must have mastered the physical strength buff. This level, is this about an entry level 4?”

“This is level 5.”

“Really? Wow, you are now a third turn, your progress is fast.

He is neither an examinee or research center employee but he knows a lot.

It is evident, how much interest chairman Park Jin-seong has in the Arena.

I carry the boar and we return to the house and the summer house is excited.

Chairman Park Jin-seong’s entourage and the summer house groundskeeper as well, are astonished.

“Oh my, you caught a wild boar?”

“Haha! How’s it? For an oldie counting down today and tomorrow’s, this is pretty impressive, isn’t it?”

“Ah, you are incredible, chairman!”

“Hahaha, no, no, this fellow caught it. We haven’t had breakfast yet, so cook this for us, hurry.”

“Yes, of course. You must be starving. I’ll take care of it right away.”

The old man begins to skillfully dissect the wild boar.

He splits the belly and after taking out the innards, slits the ankles, and with the help of chairman Park Jin-seong’s entourage, he takes off the hide. Looking at how skillfully the old man does it, I stare on in awe.

Chairman Park Jin-seong talks about it as if complimenting himself.

“Truthfully, that old man is the real master of hunting. Even if I didn’t send him his checks every month, with a gun and a dog he’d probably eat really well still.”

“Yes, seeing how he is working that boar, it doesn’t look to be his first or second time.”

I've worked on several animals while in the Arena to see that the old man is extremely skilled in this.

After a long while, we can finally eat. With the freshly caught boar, we grilled some of the meat with a spicy sauce. Like chairman Park Jin-seong said, the old man is a killer cook.

Eating with a corporate chairman, I thought it would be somehow luxurious, but this isn't bad either. Not to mention, it would have been burdensome for me to eat at a formal high end restaurant anyway.

Seeing how he even enjoyed our hunting together, I think chairman Park Jin-seong wants to carry on an amicable relationship with me.

When we finish our meal, the old groundskeeper hands us each a glass of red wine.

"Thanks. We're going to talk, just me and him."

"Yes."

The old man and the entourage leave.

In the summer house front lawn, it is just me and the chairman.

Chairman Park Jin-seong takes a sip of his red wine and savors it, then opens his mouth.

“What is the most important thing in this world?”

“Life.”

My answer has no hesitation.

With a satisfied expression, chairman Park Jin-seong nods his head.

“Yes. That answer has to come immediately. When you get that question, nothing else, like money, can cross your mind.”

“I agree.”

“You know why I search for examinees, and why I am interested in the Arena?”

“Yes.”

“I am like you guys. I am trying to live. When a person is born, they will eventually die, but I am still alive, so until my eyes close, I will try to live.”

“ ... ”

“So, I will ask you point-blank. Do you think there is a way to cure my illness?”

“Maybe. There is a healing potion to treat wounds, so wouldn’t there be some kind of item to cure disease as well?”

“As far as I know, there isn’t. That answer is from asking many examinees and as of yet, no one has a result. The Arena has things to fixing wounds, but nothing for making illness better. That world is far behind ours in medicine.”

“...”

“But the one hope I have is in a skill.”

“A skill?”

“Yes. That healing potion is made through magic. Like that, my hope is that there may be an examinee with a skill that heals illness.”

Wait, a skill?

As I hear that, skill synthesis runs through my head.

... but how?

Chapter 51 - Flames Of Life (Part 1)

Chairman Park Jinseong had yet to find a skill that could cure his illness. It is possible that such a skill does not even exist.

But even so, there is a possibility with me.

Skill synthesis!

With the special skill that I have, the skill synthesis, I can create skills that don't exist.

As long as I synthesize correctly, that is.

In my head, I can think of one way of going about it.

The healing potion!

‘It said I can use an item for synthesis.’

In the item bag, there is still some of that healing potion left over. If I use that as the item in the skill synthesis, it might create a skill that can cure illnesses.

If I can get a skill like that, not only can I use it for curing chairman Park Jinseong, but it will be beneficial to me too. Wandering around a foreign world, I can pick up all sorts of diseases. Starting with food poisoning.

I have thought it up to here when I address chairman Park Jinseong.

“I have one thing I would like to try out, could you wait a moment?”

“Of course.”

Chairman Park Jinseong’s gaze changed. As if he is putting expectations on me.

I don’t want to show others my skill synthesis so I go into the woods.

“Board retrieval.”

The board appears.

First, I retrieve the healing potion from the item bag. Then I say to the board.

“Karma prize, I want to turn this healing potion into an item.”

-Turning the healing potion (160/200 ml) in your possession into an item will cost 150 karma. Would you like to itemize it?

-Remaining karma: 300

150 karma? It's too expensive.

But I get it.

The value of the healing potion is at least worth that. Pouring it onto even a fatal wound will heal it so it is kind of like a spare life.

“I'll do it.”

-Healing potion (160/200 ml) has been itemized.

-Remaining karma: 150

I sigh. I've used up 150 karma, so I have to succeed.

“Skill synthesis.”

-Please select the skill or item.

Skills capable of being synthesized: spirit summons (Sylph),

spirit summons (Kasa), physical buffer, guider.

Items capable of being synthesized: Mosin-Nagant, item bag, healing potion (160/200 ml)

*A synthesized item will be used.

“I synthesize the spirit summons Sylph and the healing potion.”

-Synthesizing spirit summons (Sylph) and healing potion (160/200ml).

-Synthesis failed.

‘Damn.’

My heart thuds as it fails.

Is synthesis not possible? Then there’s no point in having turned the healing potion into an item.

I become anxious and continue the trial.

“I synthesize the spirit summons Kasa and the healing potion.”

-Synthesizing spirit summons (Kasa) and healing potion (160/200ml).

Pat!

A light started to shine from the board.

-Synthesis success. You have acquired the flame of life (synthesis skill).

-Healing potion (160/200ml) has been used.

-Flame of life (synthesis skill): breathe the flame of life and sprout life. Possible one use per day.

*Entry level 1: weak effect on revivification and age prevention.

‘It worked!’

I shudder.

A skill that warms the cockles of life!

Right now, at entry level one, it can only weakly effect the revival and anti-senescence, but as the level increases, the skill may become more powerful and be able to cure diseases as well.

I return to chairman Park Jinseong.

“How did it go?”

He asks right away.

“I got a result. I will show you.”

“Hurry and show me.”

I nod my head and directly follow by saying the skill name.

“Flame of life!”

Then,

Hwaluk!

Atop my palm, a flame, small like a glimmer, forms itself.

“What is that?”

“It is a flame that revives life. Um, would you like to try it?”

“You want me to eat it?”

Chairman Park Jinseong suspiciously looks at the flame floating in my hand.

“I’ll try it.”

“Okay.”

I hand over the flame. Chairman Park Jinseong stares blankly at the flame, blinks his eyes shut, and puts it in his mouth.

After eating it, chairman Park Jinseong opens his eyes and is amazed.

“Feels hot.”

“How do you feel?”

“My fatigue is completely gone. This truly is amazing! Can you make me another?”

“I can only make one a day. The explanation said it gives a weak boost towards revival and anti-senescence, but I think it may work

for you in maintaining your health for now.”

“You say... one a day...”

Chairman Park Jinseong’s eyes change again.

So, the meal is but one. If he wants another, shouldn’t there be more to the price?

I calmly await chairman Park Jinseong’s answer.

“One a day, I wish to purchase these.”

“If the conditions are right, I have no problem providing these for you.”

“[\\$100,000](#) each.”

(TN: He says 100,0000,000 South Korean Won but USD is easy to understand)

“Excuse me?”

I’m completely surprised.

A hundred thousand dollars for one?

Does that mean he's going to pay me 100k every single day?

At a number far larger than what I was expecting, and being an ordinary person, of course I'm surprised.

“Even though you haven't quite experienced what its full effect is yet?”

“Doesn't matter. Even if it cannot block the degeneration from my disease, I will pay you at least \$100,000.”

Chairman Park Jinseong gets up from his seat and stretches out his arms and stretches some more. And he continues speaking.

“It has been a long time since my body has been so energized and full of vitality. For giving me one lively day, the price of 100k is cheap.”

“ ... ”

“I will take one a day for a week and then get assessed by my doctor and see its effectiveness. If it is shown to have an effect on my disease recovery, I will raise the price I pay. In regards to payment, you won't be disappointed. I am Park Jinseong.”

This country's wealthiest man, Park Jinseong.

Then again, 100k for a day probably isn't a big deal for him. His

life is on the line so he's probably willing to spend even more.

"But there is one problem."

I seriously delve into the 'real' deal.

"Problem? Is the price not enough?"

"No. I have no issue with the price. The problem I wish to convey might be a problem for you as well."

"Do tell."

"I have a high chance of dying in the next exam."

"What?"

"I lost all my comrades in the third exam. Going forward, I have to clear the exams alone."

Chairman Park Jinseong's face is in shock.

"I heard your team is very bright and promising. There was that fellow, a Kang something, an impressive martial artist. But they all..."

"They all died. The chances are high that the Korean Arena

Research Center will give up on me.”

“Oh my...”

Chairman Park Jinseong’s face is beyond dismayed.

If I die, he has no way of getting more flames of life. He’ll lose what hope he has just found.

“It’s possible that including the one you just ate, 19 may be all that you can get.”

“That won’t do. I have finally found hope, I cannot lose it so easily.”

“I, of course, have no intention of dying. I am alone, but I will fight tooth and nail to live.”

“You, you haven’t given up yet, have you?”

“Of course not. I will live no matter what. I am informing you just in case, so you are prepared.”

“...”

He will get it. He will understand what it is I want.

I can save you, so you save me too. That's what I'm saying.

"You, what is your location?"

"What do you mean, location?"

"The district you are in in Arena.

"I have just escaped the forest at the southeast corner of the continent. I ran west, straight through the forest of red apes and lycanthropes. I lost all my teammates to the lycanthropes..."

"I understand. I will find a way."

At those words, I make a fist of happiness.

If chairman Park Jinseong will step up to aid me, there is nothing stronger that could back me up. If anything, he may support me better than the national Korean arena research center.

"The research center will contact you before the day is up."

"Contact me?"

"There is no need for you to stay with them anymore. Those bastards want money more than businesses do. Examinees without hope get rejected as worthless."

Chairman Park Jinseong shares the same opinion as Cha Jinhyuk.

“Speaking of which, you were unemployed, right?”

“... yes.”

Poked in a weak spot, I flinch.

“Tsk, a young lad.”

At chairman Park Jinseong’s scolding, I hang my head in shame. Compared to chairman Park Jinseong who made a fortune from his bare hands, my life is embarrassing indeed.

“Get a job in the morning.”

“A job?”

“Yes. You want to get pat down by the National Tax Service? You need a reason you are getting 100k a day. I will hire you on as my personal attendant and set your monthly wage at 3 million.”

That’s 36 million a year.

This net worth is similar to some premier league soccer player.

“You may have guessed by now, but Jinseong group is recruiting examinees and attaining majeong as well. We are researching how to turn the majeong into a new source of energy. Even though there is another purpose.”

The real purpose is to cure disease.

“Formally, the government does not approve businesses related to the Arena but it doesn’t forbid anything either. I have put a lot of support funding into the Korean arena research center so there won’t be a problem getting you out.”

And so, I am abruptly hired into Jinseong Group.

I have returned home and am resting when I really do get a phone call.

The person contacting me is none other than Cha Ji-hye.

-Hello.

“Hi.”

-A request came in for you from Jinseong Group and it caught me by surprise. What relationship do you have with chairman Park

Jinseong?

“This and that.”

I spare my words.

Cha Ji-hye doesn't dig deeper.

-Anyhow, Jinseong group is a big supporter of the research center and thus we couldn't really refuse his request. In following with his request, we, the research center, will sever our contract with you, Kim Hyun-ho, do you agree?

“Yes, I agree.”

-Okay, in that case, from today onwards, our contract with you is void. And personally, I am glad. I don't know the details of the situation, but for you, Mr. Kim Hyun-ho, receiving chairman Park Jinseong's aid will be more help to your survival than from us.

“Thank you for everything so far, miss Cha Ji-hye.”

-I am rooting for your ultimate survival.

“Thank you.”

And the phone call ended just like that.

Wow, how quickly this relationship with the research center wrapped up. Chairman Park Jinseong's power is indeed powerful.

And then a few moments later, a call comes from chairman Park Jinseong.

-Did you get the call?

“Yes, the contract with them is gone.”

-Good, good. I will send a person tomorrow, so we can chat then. I am looking for examinees who can help you in Arena. I have asked various national centers, so the results will be in shortly.

‘Woah.’

He is really fast at getting stuff done.

Meeting him for the first time, hunting, and eating together was just this morning. And now, not even a half a day has passed and he has already moved things along this far.

I can feel what kind of person chairman Park Jinseong is and how desperately he wants to live.

Chapter 52 - Flames Of Life (Part 2)

The next morning, I encountered a different kind of problem.

“Son!”

Mom wakes me up in the morning.

“What?”

“Do you know what day it is today?”

“Friday.”

“Today is the next month that you promised!”

“...!”

I now recall the promise I made my mom.

At mom’s constant nagging for me to go out to the store and fry chicken with her, I had asked her to let me slide for a month. But the next month that was promised has come already.

“Son, it is now time for you to enter the world of the fried chicken business.”

Mom looks like she is excited to boss me around at work.

‘Um.’

But I don’t have time for that. I cannot spend the time I have left before the next exam frying chicken!

With no other options, I tell her the truth about my getting a job.

“Mom, actually, I...”

“Don’t make excuses. From today on, son, you are a chicken businessman.”

“God forbid. This son has surprisingly gotten a job.”

“Huh? A job?”

“Yes, a job.”

“Son... did you get a part time somewhere? A part time is not a job.”

This ajumma.

I speak.

“Not a part time, I mean a real job.”

“What company would hire you? Is it a suspicious company?”

“No! What do you take me for?”

“You’re an unemployed son without education or qualifications. Don’t go work at some suspicious company that no one knows when it will go under and just come fry sweet and sour chicken with me, son.”

I understand. This is how much confidence mom has in me.

“Mom, do not be alarmed. For I have landed a job at Jinseong Group!”

“Ji, Jinseong Group?”

“Yep.”

Suddenly, my mom turns compassionate.

“Son, have you fallen into a delusion and avoiding reality? Stop saying nonsense and come to the store with mom, okay?”

“No, seriously, I’m telling the truth!”

“There is no way my son could get employed by Jinseong Group.”

I give her a moderate dramatized explanation of how I came to be hired at Jinseong Group.

“So you rescued a man while you were hiking and that man turned out to be a member of the board of directors?”

“Yea. I told him I was unemployed and he said he’d give me a job. He said he’ll put me in a good one.”

“Is that true? And that ajusshi didn’t seem weird?”

“Nope.”

“Son, the world is not so easy. There’s definitely a catch.”

“Wow, I’m serious! Just trust me!”

“Are you bullshitting me? Cause you want to stay home and lay around?”

“Ajumma, stop it, would you?”

Mom is in a deep pit of mistrust with me. So much so that she calls support.

“Hey, Hyun-ji! Stop your oppa!”

“What is it?”

Hyun-ji rushes over.

Mom tells Hyun-ji that I am insisting that I have gotten a job at Jinseong Group.

Hyun-ji hears the story and,

“Hahahahahahaha!”

She grabs her belly and rolls around in laughter. It was such an excited laugh it almost lingers in my ears like a hallucination. This bitch!

“Oppa? At Jinseong Group? Then I’ll work at Google. Haha!”

“Google doesn’t take 400 pointers on the TOEIC.”

“Hmph, Jinseong Group doesn’t take repeat civil exam taking 30 somethings either.”

“Hey now, did you leave your respect for me at the club? Why don’t you have a little more respect for your older brother, huh?”

“Oh my gosh, that’s funny! Lookit here, ajusshi. Aren’t you single? Isn’t it about time you get married? Aren’t all your friends getting hitched one by one? What are you doing by yourself?”

“Kuk...”

This cruel thing. She’s merciless.

I cannot lose like this!

“What do you mean? Don’t worry so much. I’m in the midst of something with my baby sister’s best friend!”

“Kyak! I said no to Min-jeong!”

“Hahaha! I don’t need your permission!”

“You’re dead!”

We rip at each other’s weak spots and fight. Our mom looks at us and grabs her hair in despair. Then again, I’d be in the same way if my kids were anything like us.

But then.

Ding dong~

The bell rings.

“Oh, who is this? Gas inspector?”

Mom goes out.

“Who are you?”

“Is this Kim Hyun-ho’s residence?”

“Yes, and?”

“I’ve come from Jinseong Group.”

“Huh?”

“I’ve come to escort him. Is Mr. Kim Hyun-ho inside?”

“Um, son...”

Mom, with an expression of disbelief, looks around to me.

The man that chairman Park Jinseong said he would send is already here. Here already in the morning, his pace of work really is a like a storm.

Thanks to him, I save face and my confidence shoots the sky.

“Hah, you still think I’m lying now? Think I’ve lost it and escaping reality still?”

“Even so, how could a person from Jinseong Group come here...!”

Hyun-ji looks extremely flustered as well.

I smile wryly and place my hand on Hyun-ji’s shoulder.

“My baby sister. What did you say to me earlier?”

“That, um...”

“This oppa of yours has started work at a major corporation as of today. I guess [there won’t even be any broth for you!](#)”

(TN: Korean saying about not even giving a little bit of something to someone you don’t like. Stew has good stuff like meat and veggies, but for someone you don’t like, you won’t even share a little of the broth with them.)

“No, oppa! I mean, elder brother!”

Hyun-ji’s behavior suddenly turns respectful.

“Should I prepare breakfast for you? I’ll speak formally from now, elder brother?”

“It is too late for that, you wicked creature.”

“Aww, oppa!”

Hyun-ji attaches to my arm.

Regardless of her actions, I head to the entryway where the man is and ask him to wait a little bit.

“Of course, take your time. I will wait for you in the parking lot.”

He’s Park Jinseong’s driver that I saw yesterday. He politely answers and heads down first.

I hurry and wash up and change.

I have now at least told my family that I have gotten a job so I take out the suit I never wear except for on a few occasions.

“Oppa~”

Hyun-ji appears, pretending to be cute. She just shoves her way into my clothes and takes out a tie.

“I’ll put your tie on for you, oppa.”

“Hoho, I’m so grateful. What is my rude little sister doing?”

“Aw, there’s nothing I want.”

Hyun-ji continues to show aegyo and ties the tie around my neck.

But why are her hands so familiar with tying a necktie. Who in the world has she been practicing this on?

“Thank goodness there is nothing you want. I thought maybe you came in here asking for spending money.”

“Aw, oppa! I’ll get you breakfast every morning, okay?”

“Meh. We’ll see.”

“Hehe, have a good day, elder brother!”

I take out my dress shoes in the entryway and extend my hand out to my mom who is staring, still finding all of this hard to believe.

“Mom, your son’s going to work now. Work hard, fighting!”

“Uh, yeah...”

I leave the house.

At the apartment lobby, the man is waiting. I get into the Benz he is driving and we head out.

Jinseong Group’s headquarters are in Gangnam but the direction we are headed in is Jincheongun of Chungbuk. It’s the vacation house from yesterday.

“You’ve arrived?”

Chairman Park Jinseong has already prepared everything for hunting and is waiting for me.

“Hunting again?”

“Yesterday was hardly a hunt. Today, I want to hunt right, without your special skills. More so, there’s something you should give first?”

He’s asking for the flame of life.

I nod my head.

“Okay, I will give it to you while we are out hunting.”

“Sounds good.”

We take all the provisions that the groundskeeper old man has prepared for us and we start our hunt.

When we are left just the two of us, I make the flame of life and hand it over to chairman Park Jinseong.

Chairman Park Jinseong eats the flame of life and happily smiles.

“I can definitely feel the energy. I feel as if I take one consistently every day, it will even cure my illness.”

The flame of life clearly has an effect.

Chairman Park Jinseong was having such difficulty yesterday, and today he is taking the lead, hiking well up the mountain.

It seems the German shepherd we brought has caught wind of an animal because he starts sniffing really hard.

Park Jinseong takes a look at the print on the ground and says.

“It’s an elk.”

We follow where the German shepherd leads us. We move

together and have a conversation.

“I received word from the Nordic exam group yesterday.”

“What is the Nordic exam group?”

“Five Nordic nations and associated territories have joined to found an international agency.”

“...?”

I am my usual naïve self and chairman Park Jinseong clicks his tongue at me.

“Are you ignorant or are all young people nowadays like you?”

“I am the common young person today.”

“This country is in trouble. It only says its global but it’s not very global at all.”

According to chairman Park Jinseong’s explanation, the Nordic nations include five northern European countries, which are Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland.

In addition, the three associated territories are Greenland, the Aland Islands, and the Faroe Islands.

The Nordic Exam Group was established for the Arena and supporting examinees, founded by those Nordic groups.

They are similar to other countries in that they gather majeong in efforts to turn it into a new energy source, but more than anything, they are loyal to examinees and regard their survival as their utmost goal.

“They tend to center around examinee survival and thus showed a positive reaction to your problem.”

“The Nordic Exam Group’s examinees will help me?”

Chairman Park Jinseong nods his head.

“More than anything, you are now a 3rd turn examinee. Helping a 4th turn is not that hard for veterans that have passed the 10th turn. Of course, I have arranged the price for that aid.”

“How much is the price?”

“It’s nothing. I have arranged to give \$10 million to each examinee that helps you.”

‘\$10M is nothing?!’

I’m astonished.

I'm belittled by the scale of his actions, giving that money because of me.

I can tell chairman Park Jinseong is doing everything he can to overcome his illness.

‘Thank goodness.’

For having caught the attention of Chairman Park Jinseong, and the huge luck I had in having a skill that he wanted.

“But because we don't know what kind of exam you will get for your 4th turn, they say they want to meet you in person and discuss.”

“Me personally?”

“Honestly, I spilled the sauce on something to intrigue them.”

“You mean the spirit summons?”

“Indeed. From what I have heard, there is no examinee in the Nordic Exam Group either that has the spirit summons skill either. That's why they are interested in you. And thanks to that, we get their aid.”

“That you did this all in one day, you really are amazing.”

“Yesterday, due to the flame of life I received from you, I was overflowing with energy. And because of it I was able to drive through a lot of work.”

“But you spent \$10M for me...”

“Don’t mention it.”

“...”

“You just have to not die. Survive your 4th and your 5th and so on and save me. That is enough. That much is what you owe me.”

“Yes, I will survive, no matter it.”

“Okay, now, tell me some about what you encountered in the Arena. I wish to know how you cleared your past exams.”

“Alright.”

That day, we hunted together, and I told him of the things I went through as an examinee.

Chairman Park Jinseong definitely knows how to deal with people.

He listens closely to what I say and admires and pities and makes for a good audience.

“That angel was right. You are not an average person at all.”

“You think so?”

“I do. The decisions you made during the exams aren’t average.”

Chairman Park Jinseong looks most pleased with himself.

“I expected as much but hearing your story, I can rest easy now. You are not one to die so easily. If I fully support you, going forward, you will do well in passing these exams alone.”

Going forward...

But to be frank, chairman Park Jinseong needs me only until his disease is cured. There’s no way to know what will happen after.

So what?

A relationship that is beneficial to both is the best relationship.

Just as he needs me, I too most definitely need his help and will receive it.

At the very least, I can now start to see a hope in my future that wasn't there before.

Chapter 53 - Outcomes (Part 1)

Half the day went by and it started to get dark and we succeed at hunting. When the German shepherd shot forward and bit and held on, chairman Park Jinseong shot it.

I chuck the elk over my shoulder and head back towards the vacation home and on our way, chairman Park Jinseong is grinning ear to ear.

“Starting tomorrow, come to work at this location.”

“...I’m sorry?”

“It’s nice here. There are no people so it’s easy to practice your skills, the air is good, and there’s a person here who will feed you.”

At those words, I have no response. I’m supposed to come to work here in this mountainside every day?”

“Doesn’t Jinseong Group have a location set aside for examinees?”

“We only have a center where we gather information on the Arena. We don’t manage examinees like that.”

“What?”

“No matter how much we analyze at the research center, how could we know any better than examinees themselves? The job that Jinseong Group does is give out salaries, gather majeong, and share information we get from other agencies. Proactive things like practicing skills should be done by examinees.”

“Then what about things like a practice facility?”

“I’ve been told training facilities are all useless. You’ve been to the Korean Arena Research Center? Were there any people in the training rooms?”

“ ... ”

Now that I think about it, there was no one in the training floors at the research center. But the facilities were great.

“Just leaving it up the examinee himself is what’s best. Having someone who has never been to the Arena tell you how to do this or that is only a distraction. Also, the examinees I have are usually past their 10th turn.”

Everything he’s saying makes a lot of sense.

“It’s not that far from your house to here. Start coming here to work from tomorrow.”

“But I don’t have a car...”

“Why not?”

Chairman Park Jinseong randomly takes out a set of car keys from his pocket. It’s a response as if he was waiting for my answer.

But it’s not a normal car key.

“What is this?”

“I used to drive it out for hunting and now it’s yours.”

“You’re giving me a car?”

“It’s a 3-year-old model. You get it now.”

“This. This logo looks like a Porsche?”

Yep.

The item that chairman Park Jinseong just casually threw me is a special and luxurious Porsche car.

“Don’t use domestic cars. The airbags don’t go off.”

Hmm, an automobile CEO might grab his collar for that.

“I, um, I don’t know how to drive...”

“Don’t you have a license?”

How did he know I have a license? What does he take private information for?

“I did but I got it 6 years ago.”

Chairman Park Jinseong yells in frustration.

“My goodness, lad, is there nothing you know how to do at the age of 30? Why is a young person like you living like this?”

He blatantly attacks me and it gets me fired up!

“That’s true, since I can’t do anything right except for saving your life, I guess my life really amounts to failure. Damn, why am I so incapable!”

“Ah, well, it happens.”

Chairman Park Jinseong quickly returns to his former state.

“Anyway, I’ll leave a person here to teach you how to drive. Learn and drive here tomorrow.”

“And you?”

“I’m going to come here every morning for exercise. I have to eat the flame and anyway, the business stuff gets taken care of by my children now.”

On recent news or newspapers, there are articles ‘Chairman Park Jinseong’s health declining’ and ‘start of new management’ are circulating.

People probably think that chairman Park Jinseong is at the hospital or at home pondering if today or tomorrow is the day.

But the truth is he is energetic and out hunting with me.

I get bored and jokingly ask.

“So I heard that lately Jinseong Group is gyro dropping?”

Chairman Park Jinseong’s face becomes gloomy. Haha, there is probably only me that can make a joke like this with the legendary chairman Park Jinseong. I really have some nerve.

“I’m sure it’s because the people are surprised. My sons don’t have a lot of experience either.”

Chairman Park Jinseong smirks.

“The stock will recover as soon as I’m back.”

“I’m sure it will.”

“I will live no matter what and return. It’s not time for me to die yet.”

I can sense his strong will. I get a lump in my chest.

In the Arena, I have to fight for my life. To live...A thing that sure is not a for sure thing for me.

Yet there is a person who is not an examinee with the same strong will to survive and working as hard to do it. Seeing others with terminal illnesses not giving up and trying to overcome it gives me courage.

We return to the vacation house and hand the elk to the old man.

The old man deals with the elk and puts it in the freezer and grills the boar we caught yesterday. This time not with red wine but with rice wine.

Chairman Park Jinseong, unlike a sickly old man, scarfs down a serving of the meat and drink. Seeing this, the old groundskeeper smiles in satisfaction.

‘There is definitely an effect from the flame of life.’

I feel a little regret. If I could make a lot, I would give my mom some. Hmm, she’d be alarmed and ask what is this flame. I guess I could secretly put it in her mouth while she’s sleeping?

After our meal, I see the two cars parked behind the vacation house.

One is the Benz that chairman Park Jinseong rides around in, and another, black with sleek and elegant lines, a gorgeous SUV. And the Porsche logo right there in the front is a lasting impression.

“Is this a Porsche Cayenne?”

“It is, it’s three years old but she’s not bad.”

She’s not bad at all. I’m not sure but it’s about a \$100,000 SUV.

“You’re really giving me this?”

“You said you have no car. I don’t ride it anyway.”

“Thank you so much.”

“If you’re thankful, drive it well. And don’t die in a car accident or anything.”

“I won’t die so pathetically, don’t worry.”

“Don’t die heroically either, you. Live no matter what. Isn’t that how I’ll keep living?”

“Got it.”

“I’m going to go now, learn to drive.”

“Will do.”

Chairman Park Jinseong pats me on my shoulder and then gets into the Benz. His entourage escort him and only one guy stays behind.

“I received an order to teach you how to drive.”

“Okay, let’s start.”

I let out a sigh and begin practicing how to drive. I find it interesting that the key box is on the left side, but I turn on the knob and vroom-a smooth engine sound emanates.

From the engine sound to the leather against my back to the interior design, it is all a work of art.

‘Is this really my car?’

In excited glee, I learn to drive.

When I was getting my license, I remember failing the driver’s test three times. I really have no skill with driving. But oddly enough, this time, I pick it up right away.

“You are doing really well.”

I even get a compliment.

How is this possible? Do I actually have driving skill?

No way. I know. I’m a terrible driver.

‘It’s the reflexes skill!’

I know the secret.

Its thanks to the reflexes synthesis skill. Because of the reflexes, I get how to use the handle and brake and they are more familiar to my body.

As I get the handle of it, and to experience road driving, I drive through the south main road all the way to Cheonan. Then we arrive at my apartment at Cheonan and I practice parking, easily.

“Maybe because you already have your license, but you learned very quickly.”

“It’s all thanks to your good teaching.”

“No, no. Anyhow, you have definitely learned so I’ll be on my way now.”

“Okay, got it.”

I send the man away and stay awhile inside the Porsche, taking it all in. This is my car!

A foreign car isn’t the issue.

\$100,000 a day!

That is the amount I get from chairman Park Jinseong.

‘I’m rich!’

If only I can survive.

4th, 5th, 6th... if only I can survive the upcoming exams! If I can, I can live without want for anything.

My will to live grows stronger.

It may be that chairman Park Jinseong's will to live is like this too. The more you have, the harder it is to leave it all behind.

‘I don’t want to die!’

Hye-su.

Joon-ho.

Is this what you guys would have felt?

If you were all alive, you might have had the same opportunity as me. If only you were alive!

“Hu hu hu...”

I laugh. But tears come out.

I’m sorry.

I’m really sorry. I’m so sorry that I couldn’t save any of you.

I sob in the parking lot.

I don't exactly tell my family that I have come to possess a Porsche Cayenne.

But later that night, I get caught.

Hyun-ji had walked into my room with coffee and snacks to bribe me with when she saw the Porsche keys on my desk.

“Huh? Oppa! This is a Porsche key!”

“Huh? Ah...”

“Where did you get it? Huh? Hmm? Where? Is this yours?”

“Well, that...”

“Kyak! Mom! Sis! Look at this!”

Hyun-ji takes the car keys and goes to the hallway. How rude, if you asked me questions at least give me the time to respond!

Mom and noona storm into my room and interrogate me.

Eventually, I spit out some weird story about how the director member I rescued from the mountain not only gave me a job but also this Porsche as a gift.”

“Really? And you didn’t sign some sort of odd contract when you received this?

Noona asks in disbelief and I say no. In the end I end up telling her I’ll show her my contract as proof. I should tell the chairman about that.

“How is this possible?”

Mom inspects the car keys suspiciously, touching it and mumbling.

What a house steeped in mistrust. Just let it go already!

Only Hyun-ji is excited and prancing about.

“Oppa! Drop me off at school tomorrow! In the Porsche! Porsche!”

My head feels tense.

Then the next morning.

As arranged, I am getting ready to go to work at the mountain home when suddenly, Hyun-ji is ready to go to school and quickly rushes out of her room.

“Oppa~ You have to go with Hyun-ji. You have to take your cute baby sister to school.”

“Take the train.”

“Aw, the subway is scary. There are too many perverts.”

“What pervs. Go on! Tsk.”

“Aw, oppa!”

Hyun-ji latches on and complains. She sticks like glue to me and when we get to the parking lot and she sees the black Porsche Cayenne, she screams and heads for it.

As if she had turned into a racing model, she crosses her legs atop the hood and takes a multitude of selfies.

I push the switch and open the car doors and Hyun-ji hurriedly gets into the passenger seat and takes more selfies. I slowly start to worry if my baby sister is in her right mind.

I turn the car on and drive and next to me, Hyun-ji’s phone keeps going off. She must’ve have uploaded the pictures to her social

media accounts already.

Hyun-ji is excitedly exchanging text messages.

Then she giggles and speaks to me.

“Oppa, Min-jeong said she loves you. But she said you rejected her?”

“ ... ”

“She said she’s being honest. She won’t give up. Haha! I told you, she’s not in her right mind.”

Cause she’s your friend.

Hyun-ji’s school is in Cheonan and we get there quickly. We enter the very lax university that Hyun-ji was able to be accepted into. Her and I quickly draw the attention of many students.

“Oppa, thank you! I love you! Have a good day at work. I’ll make a tasty dinner!”

Being cute to the end. As soon as she gets out the car, her friends crowd her and start to ask if I really am her oppa.

I click my tongue and back out of the school.

Chapter 54 - Outcomes (Part 2)

When I arrive at the mountain home, I eat the sandwich and milk the old groundskeeper prepared for me and head right into the woods.

The urgent problem that has been given to me is to test out all my skills and learn an appropriate fighting style.

I'm thinking I'll test out all my skills first before deciding how to use my remaining 150 karma.

“Board retrieval.”

The board appears in front of my eyes.

“Show me all my skills.”

As I say so, the words on the board change and list out all the skills I have.

-Showing all acquired skills.

-Main skill: spirit summons (entry level 1)

-Assist skill: physical strength buff (entry level 5), guider (entry level 1)

-Special skill: skill synthesis

-Synthesis skill: divine protection of wind (entry level 1), divine protection of fire, (entry level 1), reflex (entry level 1), flame of life (entry level 1)

Thanks to the synthesis skill, I've increased my number of skills quite a bit. Each one is useful and none are a waste and it makes me happy.

“Show me the ones among these that can be raised a level with 150 karma.”

-Showing skills that can be raised a level with 150 karma.

-Assist skill: guider (entry level 1)

-Synthesis skill: divine protection of wind (entry level 1), divine protection of fire (entry level 1), reflexes (entry level 1), flame of life (entry level 1)

They are all entry level 1 skills. I fall into pondering on which of these to level up.

First, take out the guider. Raising the level on this would just be a waste.

The flame of life is also out. Even if I raise it, it's only good for chairman Park Jin-seong, and not much use to me.

‘Then the divine protection of wind, divine protection of fire, or reflexes, one of those three. I’ll decide after testing out all these.’

I decide to lightly experiment with all the skills.

“Sylph.”

-Meow.

A slender cat appears and delicately sits on my shoulder.

“Will you find me a boar?”

-Meow.

Sylph quickly flits away.

I decide to make my opponent a boar. Other than a vicious boar, there really isn't much else out in these woods.

Sylph returns pretty fast and points to the right. Following her

guidance, I start to lightly run.

“Divine protection of wind.”

I start the skill.

And something amazing happens.

Pat!

“Huh?!”

Every time I take a step, wind blows from my feet and my body is lifted a little bit. Just like it sounds, it feels like I’m running on air.

Lightly, lightly, due to the wind, my body is lifted into the air.

At first, it’s difficult to get my balance, but because of the reflex skill, I quickly adjust to it.

‘Let’s get some speed!’

I really push my feet into the ground and the force from my feet becomes stronger.

Paat!

I easily jump forward 2 meters.

“Hahaha!”

Using the big jump, I bolt forward running.

Jump, jump, I speed forward at an incredibly fast pace.

I was moving so fast that not even 30 seconds passed before I reached upon the boar that Sylph was leading me to.

“Chot!”

With a yell, I take a big hard step and jump up.

The biggest jump is 4 meters.

Hopping as if I’m flying, my eyes meet that of the boar.

“Chweek?!”

The boar is taken by surprise and falters back a few steps. But from his nostrils he breathed out fumes, building up for a fight.

Of course, I am not worried.

I have the physical strength buff entry level 5 and thus can take the power of the boar's attack with my strong body and quick reflexes.

I make a left jab towards the boar.

Pung!

“Gwek!”

Wind blows from my fist and lands on the boar's face.

‘I can fight like this.’

I attack the boar with a series of jabs. And every time, a gust of wind lands on the boar's face.

But the power of the gust of wind doesn't seem all that strong. The boar keeps taking the hits and continues to charge at me.

I use all the strength I can gather to punch, but the gust of wind with all my strength cannot stop the boar's advance.

“Chet!”

I easily dodge to the left. Like a bullfighter, I avoid the attack and

counter with a light jab.

The best fighting technique when using the divine protection of wind is out boxing.

But to speak more accurately, its more useful in avoiding but not that much a help with attacking.

‘Is this because this is entry level 1? Then I suppose the divine protection of fire won’t be that strong either.’

Even if I shoot out the fire from my fists, I’m thinking it won’t be strong enough to turn the boar into whole roast boar. Then again, these are all entry level 1, I guess I shouldn’t expect so much.

‘Huh? Hold up...’

Something flies across my brain.

‘If I combine the fire and wind, will they become strong?’

I try it out right away.

“Divine protection of fire!”

Then I punch with full force at the boar. From my first, a gust of wind and flame come out at the same time.

Pung-!

“Gwek!”

The boar screams and backs up.

My thinking was correct. The flame and wind basically make an explosion.

The aftermath of the explosion hits the boar on one side of its face and its fur gets singed. It's the level of a light burn.

‘Using the divine protection of wind and the divine protection of fire together makes for something threatening at least.’

When I was using just the gust of winds, the boar took a few hits and then didn't fear it at all.

But when the fire rode the gust of wind and exploded, it was hot and the boar was scared of it.

Pung! Puung!

“Gwek!”

The boar was in pain and backed up far away. But it wasn't a

defining blow.

‘I have to hit it directly for effect.’

My body at the physical buffer entry level 5 is the limits of human physicality. It will most likely be more effective to use this power and directly hit instead.

But as I try to directly hit it, another problem presents itself.

It's hard to hit it.

The opponent isn't a human and because the boar is low to the ground, it's difficult to attack.

I have to kick instead of using my fists but that isn't easy either.

Whenever I get close, the boar rushes at me.

With a boar that rushes strongly at me, I can be the one to suffer if I try kicking it head on.

After i avoid it lightly to the side, I quickly kick the boar in the side.

Pung!

At the same time as the kick lands, the explosion from the wind and fire goes off.

“Gwek!”

The boar steps back.

‘A slight miss!’

I didn’t get a good kick. My posture was messed up for it.

On top of that, I’ve never learned any fighting so I wouldn’t have any know how.

‘Know how?’

I know how I’m going to use that 150 karma now.

“Board retrieval!”

While I’m countering this boar I retrieve my board and shout.

“Karma prize, raise level on reflex skill!”

As I do so, I can see the words on the board change.



-Reflex (synthesis skill) level has been increased.

-Reflex (synthesis skill): get the skill to maneuver body.

*entry level 2

-remaining karma: 0

‘Done!’

I once again escape the boar’s lunge. And like last time, I kick the boar in its side.

Buk!

Pung!

“Gwek!”

The sorrowful scream of the boar!

This time, it landed correctly. It is thanks to the reflexes and its resulting increased athleticism.

I take advantage of the boar faltering and nimbly kick it again in

the face.

It's a style kind of like taekwondo. I keep my spacing/distance and extended my kick towards the boar.

When the boar is turned raggedy from burns, the wind protection is up.

'15 minutes went by fast.'

As the wind protection disappears, only the fire comes out.

Hwa lu luk!

There is no explosion so the power is weaker.

But the boar has already been injured a lot and is exhausted. It feels like animal cruelty and I feel terrible. I decide to end it.

"Sylph, finish it."

-Meow!

The end is a blade of wind.

It's the flaw with the bare hands fighting. With an opponent with good endurance like this boar, it is difficult to end a life with my

bare hands with the killing power I have.

‘I should use bare hands fighting more for defense. If I get close and fight, Sylph can attack from farther away.’

The boar, with a slit throat, falls over and dies.

The fight is over and coincidentally, my phone vibrates.

[Chairman Park Jin-seong: where are you?]

[Me: I just caught a boar.]

[Chairman Park Jin-seong: Really? Bring it over.]

Wait, this oldie, considering his age, he texts really fast. Is it cause he’s the owner of a IT business that makes smartphones?

I pick up the boar and return to the mountain home. It was a short fight but it’s a rather large boar and not in vain.

“Why is it all burnt up?”

The groundskeeper elder asks as he handles the boar.

Meanwhile, I hand a flame of life to chairman Park Jin-seong.

Chairman Park Jin-seong eats it and his face looks refreshed.

“I live for these.”

“Is it tasty?”

I ask because I’m actually curious. It’s because I am the owner of these flames and I’ve never gotten to taste one.

“It’s not tasty per se, but the moment you eat it, the fatigue goes away and the energy flows and feels great. I can definitely feel myself getting healthier.”

Chairman Park Jin-seong looks to be in a good mood today.

“Yesterday, my physician examined me and complimented me and said my condition looks good. I’m supposed to go back in a week and get another exam.”

“I hope it has an effect.”

“It will. That’s how I feel. I am so full of energy so it must have an effect.”

I hope too that it does have an effect. That way, I can get more money.

“Oh right, I received word from the Nordic Exam Group. They want to see you next Monday.”

“Where?”

“Denmark. You can come with me.”

“You’re going to go too?”

“I have to eat the flame. I can’t miss it even for a day.”

“...”

I can sense his strong will to improve his body. Then again, his life does depend on it.

“You’re coming for me, I feel a little bad about it.”

“Don’t be, my kids are running the business so I’m free. I’ll just take this opportunity to visit my North European offices.”

“Then we’re going on your private jet?”

“Of course. You’ll come with me.”

Ah, he's like a rock. I kind of liken it to the father that takes you to preschool.

I did want the protection of chairman Park Jin-seong's strong entourage but I had no idea I would get this much support.

"Don't be burdened by it."

Chairman Park Jin-seong is like a ghost that reads my mind.

"You deserve that much. You are this Park Jin-seong's lifeline."

"..."

"Only think about surviving the exams. If you survive, you will get all the wealth and honor. And if you can cure me, I will count you as my savior and you and your family, I will take care of. That is a promise chairman Park Jin-seong is making to you."

"...I understand."

That day's lunch entrée is a gridiron grilled boar. With bean paste soup and kimchi and all sorts of side dishes and multigrain rice is all incredibly tasty. His cooking skills are worthy of chairman Park Jin-seong's praise.

Seeing the old groundskeeper's fierce loyalty, it makes me think that chairman Park Jin-seong is worthy of trusting. He repays as

much help as he receives which is why he gets such loyalty.

‘I have gained a good helper.’

Chairman Park Jin-seong is like a lifeline to me, an examinee in crisis with no teammates.

The skill synthesis and flame of life have saved me.

Chapter 55 - Outcomes (Part 3)

I make two labor contracts with chairman Park Jinseong.

One is the real contract outlining our agreement as examinee and sponsor. The weekly wage is \$700,000, and I receive that incredulous amount every Monday. There is, of course, the attached option for an increase based on my results.

The other is a fake contract.

This is purely a fake labor contract to show my family. As a contract intended to show my unbelieving mother and noona, I am employed as an entourage/guard/secret service to the chairman with an annual salary of \$54,000.

When I take this fake contract home and show it to mother and noona, it's only then that they believe me. And Hyun-ji's aegyo gets stronger.

Her son has just been employed by a huge company, yet mom doesn't seem joyed by it.

"I was going to hand over the business to you and retire..."

"Mom, I'm sorry. Fried chicken must not be in this son's fate."

"Oh gosh, I guess then I'll have to give it to Hyun-ji."

Hyun-ji who was getting to me coffee, is taken aback.

“Me?”

“Yes, you, since my son just got a big job, the only unemployed person left in this house is you.”

“I’m not unemployed! I’m going to get a job!”

“Hyun-ji, looking at your grades or your TOIEC (400) or your character, employment is kind of out of the question.”

“I can do it! And yeah okay about the grades and my score, but what’s wrong with my character?”

“You hate doing hard work so you wiggle out.”

“What! I will get employed! I can get employed!”

“Think carefully. Let’s say you do get a job, it’ll be at some average small business, making what, \$20,000? In that situation, what do you say to just taking over mom’s business?”

“I don’t want to do fried chicken. I’m going to be a career woman.”

As Hyun-ji says the words ‘career woman’ I’m aghast. Noona looks to be too.

Mom sits close to Hyun-ji and speaks in a calm voice.

“Hyun-ji, think carefully, okay? Don’t you like luxury things?”

Nod.

“Don’t you want to drive around in a nice car and spend loads of money and play?”

Nod, nod.

“Then should your choice be to join a small business that who knows will fail when in this poor economy, or the fired up fried chicken store?”

“Well, um...”

I can see the dilemma on Hyun-ji’s face.

“So what if the work is a little hard? What if it is a chicken business? You can spend that hard earned money on nice clothes and nice bags and vacation abroad.”

“Yeah, but I...”

“Think hard. What choice will you not regret in 10 years?”

“Yeah, your brains are bad so just ease your suffering, manual labor suits you.”

Noona coldly agrees.

Then again, mom and noona, someone has to think for Hyun-ji.

I speak up.

“Yeah, Hyun-ji. I’ll leave the fried chicken business to you. Chicken fryer lady in the day, and attractive club-goer at night! Doesn’t it sound good?”

I am the oppa that thinks for Hyun-ji most of all.

“Hu ah ang! I’m going to study! I’m going to study and get a good job somewhere!”

Hyun-ji runs into her room crying.

I laugh and roll around on the floor.

Poor thing, but you reap what you sow. Why not try a little harder?

“I think it’ll work with a little more persuading.”

Says mom with a venomous glint in her eyes.

“When she graduates college, I’ll cut off her allowance. When she needs the money, tell her to work at the store. When she gradually gets used to the store work, eventually she will...”

The student has become the master. Noona has an even more venomous and elaborate plan.

“Oh my, yes, that’s a good idea. Once she tastes money she won’t be able to think about living off a rat’s tail of a salary.”

I look at the 99.99% DNA that is shared between mother and daughter and shiver. I am so glad that their target is not me. It’s as if I can already see the image of Hyun-ji frying chicken.

Even on the weekend, I go to the mountain house every morning. It’s because I have to give the flame of life to chairman Park Jinseong.

However, I can get off work at any time so I have no problem with it. More than anything, the weekly wage is \$700,000. There’s no way I’d have a problem with this.

Outside of that, chairman Park Jinseong listened to every request I made.

I said I needed more 7.62mm bullets for my Mosin-Nagant and he immediately contacted the Korean Arena Research Center and received a couple boxes.

When I said I wanted to learn martial arts he put one of his personal guards on it. His age is 28, younger than me, but he is a national high school boxing bronze medalist and district muay thai competition winner.

“I don’t think you’ll be needing the basic exercise.”

Having seen my body that is enhanced to the human limit, guard Choi Hyuk looks a bit jealous. Then again. Seeing my chiseled and detailed muscles surprises myself too.

“I will begin by teaching you the basics.”

Choi Hyuk adjusts my imitation jab movement.

From the effect of the reflex/athleticism skill, I get the right jab movement.

Following the jab, I learn the straight and basic footwork. I practice those until the day gets dark. At night too I go up Taejo

mountain and repeat and practice until dawn.

The next day, Choi Hyuk sees my footwork and jab and straight and is surprised.

“Okay, you are doing it well.”

“Really?”

“But you still need to repeat it every day so that in a fight it comes out naturally as a reflex.”

“Okay.”

That day, I practice by hitting the special sand bag that Choi Hyuk brought until it is ragged. Normally, practicing that hard like that would tear at the knuckles but my fists are fine due to the physical strength buff.

The weekend passes and Monday comes around.

Like always, I give a flame of life to chairman Park Jinseong and ask.

“The guard, Choi Hyuk. Is it okay that he knows I am an examinee?”

“He knows, so it doesn’t matter.”

Choi Hyuk is not just a guard but he belongs to the 3rd secretary office.

The 3rd secretary office has people that do things that cannot be made open to the public, and martial artists like Choi Hyuk are also included there.

‘Now that I think about it, that Lee Jung-shik guy that came to me that first day said he was the head of the 3rd secretary office.’

Only then am I convinced and I relax and learn from Choi Hyuk.

That day, I don gloves and a helmet and do some simple sparring, and attack Choi Hyuk with the footwork and jab, and straight that I learned.

In terms of skill I am clearly disadvantaged so I am hit more often. But because of the physical strength buff entry level 5, my endurance for one, and my reaction and reflections are far better and I am able to overpower him.

Honestly, even with this difference, in the end we tie, and that makes Choi Hyuk pretty incredible.

Even though I pushed forward, if this were a boxing match, Choi Hyuk probably would have received more points.

“Even if you only learn the defense really well, it looks like there is no way I can win. But you still have a lot to learn so you must try hard.”

“Yes, thank you.”

After that, I learn blocking and practice defending from Choi-Hyuk’s one-sided attacks. I had no idea there were so many kinds of blocking.

Evening comes and I take my favorite horse, my Porsche cayenne, and go home.

‘Wait, isn’t Monday the day I get paid?’

I log into my mobile banking on my smartphone. And then I verify the amount...

‘Huk!’

Is this the feeling of adrenaline rushing my body? When I look at the balance, it is hard for me to maintain reality.

A million.

It has been five days since I met chairman Park Jinseong and I gave him the flame of life and the money that is there is twice the

amount, 10 million.

I am astonished and I call chairman Park Jinseong.

I was worried that a magnate like chairman Park Jinseong might not take a call from me, but thankfully he answers right away.

-Hi, whats the matter?

“I am sorry for calling so randomly. Can you talk?”

-That’s alright. If it’s a call from you, I must always receive it. Are you calling because the money you got today?”

“Yes, it is too much...”

-I had a physical today.

In that one sentence is the explanation for why the amount is higher than promised.

Chairman Park Jinseong speaks in a bright voice.

-I’ve been told the cancer cell metastasis has halted. Not only has it stopped, but, albeit slightly, it has shrunk. We’ll have to watch a while longer, but I’m sure I’m getting better.

“Congratulations.”

-I felt so good which is why I gave you more, so don't be burdened by it.

“Thank you.”

-No need. But this doesn't mean I will always give you twice the amount. There's the thing with the Nordic Exam Group and I am spending a great deal on you too. You understand?

“Yes, of course.”

He did take me out of the research center, and I have been promised aid from the Nordic Exam Group. With all these happenings, the expense incurred for me might be just a bit shy of 5 million already.

-Do not be disappointed. If I am for sure cured, you are my savior. The savior to this Jinseong Group's Park Jinseong.

“I am not disappointed at all. Even now, this is plenty.”

-Mm. Anyway, we're going to Denmark on Wednesday so prepare well.

“Yes, do not worry.”

-Then I'll see you tomorrow.

And the phone call ended like that.

I look at the mobile banking screen on my smartphone and smirk.

‘Was making money this easy?’

Money that is hard for people to make in a lifetime, was built in five days. I become suspicious if this is reality or not.

But it is reality.

The value on my screen before my eyes is definitely...

“A million?!”

“Oh geez, you surprised me!”

From behind me is a shocked scream and because of it I'm shocked too.

‘What is this?!’

I quickly turn around.

...It's Hyun-ji.

In both hands, as snacks for me, are coffee and sweet red bean bun on a tray. This TOIEC 400 pointer baby sister of mine, you are very persistent.

“What, what? How long have you been standing there?”

“Did I just...”

Hyun-ji replies with a blank stare.

“Ah, seriously, you aren't supposed to just walk into a passionate man's room with a computer like that. First, you should knock and then close your eyes shut when you come in!”

“But did I just see a million...”

“Yeah right, a million where?”

“That, a million on your smartphone...”

“This? Nah, hahaha. It's game money. While this oppa of yours was studying for the civil exam, I became not the master civil servant but a master of online poker.”

“But it said Citizens Bank on it...”

“You saw wrong. Come one, thanks for the snacks. Give it to me and hurry on out. Hwi, hwi (shoo shoo).”

Then, Hyun-ji’s brain that had been far flung off in Andromeda, returns.

This bitch, she raises her eyes sharp at me and talks.

“Do you take me for some idiot that can’t recognize a mobile banking screen?”

“...”

“Show it to me. That was 1 million wasn’t it? My eyes aren’t wrong, are they?”

Hyun-ji swiftly takes my smartphone. It’s a maneuver faster than the best jab.

“Oh my gosh... oh my gosh...! It’s really a million bucks. A real million! One, tens, hundreds, thousands, ten thousand, hundred thousand, a million...! Oh my gosh, oh my gosh!”

“What do you mean oh my gosh? Dear child, this is none of your business.”

“Oppa!”

“What, why?”

“Where did you get this money?”

“...Oppa is doing some business with friends.”

“What? Really?”

“Uh, yeah. With the money I made at part time, my friends and I put it together and invested in a shopping mall. I didn’t want mom and noona to worry about me losing money on a venture capital so I kept it secret.”

Another weird ass story flows forth from my lips.

“Then getting hired at Jinseong Group and the Porsche...”

“No, those are real. I did get hired at Jinseong Group. You saw the contract.”

“Oppa...”

“What?”

Hyun-ji’s eyes, it looks like she is in love.

“I love you, oppa.”

“ ... ”

What did she say?

Chapter 56 - Yoo Min-Jeong (Part I)

“Are we rich now?”

“What are you doing, trying to sneak in a we?”

“Ah, oppa!”

“Hold up!”

I use the side step I learned from Choi Hyuk to avoid Hyun-ji's lunge at me. Who would have thought that the effects of training would be used here this way.

“You are assuming incorrectly because this money isn't my money.”

“Huh? Then what?”

“Company funds! The foundation of a corporate body is funds. So don't think that this money is my money.”

“Are you sure you didn't just pull that out of your ass?”

How is she so sharp randomly?

“You think it's easy becoming a millionaire? With what method

would I have just casually made a million bucks?”

“Aw, darn.”

Thankfully, dim-witted Hyun-ji believes what I say. Thank goodness.

“Anyway, what kind of shopping mall is it?”

“Parts, you know, a computer parts shopping mall.”

I almost said fashion. If I had said that, Hyun-ji would definitely have showed interest and spewed some nonsense like asking me to use her as a model.

“Yeah? Does that shopping mall need models?”

...of course. This is Hyun-ji.

“Why would computer parts need a model? We don’t need them.”

“And the shopping mall is doing well?”

“It’s okay, just enough for a little spending money. I don’t have a lot of stake.”

“Then oppa, with the salary you get from working at Jinseong Group and this from the mall, wow! Oppa, you must really make a lot of money.”

“Well, it’s good enough for eating and living.”

“Aw, don’t be modest.”

Hyun-ji is out of the million-dollar shock and returned to her old self and starting with the aegyo again.

There is a reason Hyun-ji is only flattering me like this.

Who is the person that gives an allowance to Hyun-ji? It’s noona, bloodless and tearless, the cold old maid, miss Kim Hyun-joo. No matter how flattering and cute Hyun-ji is to her, there won’t even be any soup.

Compared to that, I am a far easier adversary. When we were young, there are many things I forfeited because I couldn’t stand her constant nagging...

“Oppa, don’t be like that, just tell me. I can tell unni is hiding something, its unsettling.”

“Huh?”

“She’s probably thinking of stopping my allowance once I

graduate college.”

She’s good at catching the drift.

“Don’t you think unni was just too mean to me from the get go? I get in trouble for partying out late, and she tells me not to eat your chips.”

Seriously, stop eating my chips!

“She has no love for her younger sister, really. We have such a big age difference, shouldn’t she find me cute and adorable?”

“The fact that you think like that is the problem.”

“Anyway, oppa, give me some money, huh? I’ll be really good to you. You want me to introduce you to some girls? Amongst my school friends, not anyone like Min-jeong who just parties, but there are girls who do well in school and are demure. When you dropped me off in your car, they all begged me to introduce you to them.”

Meh. Even if they do really well in school, if it’s a student from Hyun-ji’s school, I can tell that class without even looking.

“Oh and be careful about Min-jeong. She’s really hitting on you.”

“Me?”

“Yeah, last time I said let’s go to the club and now she said she doesn’t do that anymore.”

“You should stop going too.”

Hyun-ji completely ignore what I say and just continues on with what she has to say.

“She said she’s going to live now as a good girl or something? Oh my gosh, a while ago she even started studying for traditional Korean cooking? She said she’s going to get the western and Chinese ones too!”

“So, what about it? Those are good things.”

“I’m telling you, this is all her wagging her tail at you. She’s past girlfriend, she’s eyeing your wife position.”

“That’s some speculation.”

“Well, just be careful of that foxy bitch.”

“I don’t know. Right now, I’m not interested in girls.”

The problem is whether I’ll live or die, girls are not in the equation.

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

“What, why aren’t you getting out? Are you not done in here?”

At my question, Hyun-ji abruptly sits in my lap.

“Oppa, allowance! Please?”

“Why are you asking me for it? Pretty soon, you’ll be making more than me.”

Hyun-ji looks suspiciously at me and I smile and add.

“Fried chicken.”

“Gyak! Seriously! You’re so dead!”

Hyun-ji blows up.

Hyun-ji actually just lays down on my bed and starts to say she won’t leave until I give her some money.

When I try to shoo her out, she crawls under the blankets like a

snail and then barbarically throws off her pants and shirt. I can't force her out of my room now, I have no options.

“If you don't give it to me, I'm going to tattle on mom and unni that you are doing business!”

“I lose, I lose.”

I put \$500 into Hyun-ji's bank account. Hyun-ji verifies it on her mobile banking and then giggles in happiness.

“Oppa, thank you! I love you!”

“Put your clothes back on and get out!”

“Okay!”

Hyun-ji fumbles under the blankets putting her clothes back on and then leaves my room.

After the storm passes, only then do I look again at my mobile banking screen.

One million.

The \$500 I gave to Hyun-ji can't even be seen.

“Hahaha.”

I laugh.

I think to myself that I can at least set aside enough money for Hyun-ji’s future before I die. Mom and noona will live well on their own but I worry about Hyun-ji.

But then.

Ring.

My smartphone vibrates. A message from Min-jeong.

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Doesn’t it look tasty?]

With that message came a picture of a delicious looking Pollack fish with a red pepper paste sauce.

[Me: oo* it looks so tasty. I heard you studying traditional Korean cooking lately?]

(TN: Korean quick way of texting ‘en’ which means ‘yup’. 응 is the actual word)

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: haha did you hear that from Hyun-ji?]

[Me: oo]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Would you like to come over and eat some?
I'll show you my skills]

‘Woah.’

Hyun-ji's words were right.

Min-jeong is hitting on me, and maybe she's changed her tactic because she's not being subtle about it anymore.

I can't turn her down directly so I answer in a circle.

[Me: I'm going to Denmark on a business trip and I don't know when I'll be back. I'll call you when I get back though^^]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Denmark?]

[Me: oo for work]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: You're so cool! I want to go to Denmark too @.@]

[Me: keke, anyway, I'll call you when I get back]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: When are you going?]

Oi, I'm pretty sure she knows I just rejected her and she's just ignoring it. She wasn't normally like this, why is she like this now? Is it cause of the Porsche?!

[Me: Wednesday]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: okay! Got it]

The conversation ends like that. I don't know what she's saying she's got, but I have a bad feeling about it.

The next day, a day before going to Denmark, I go to the mountain house again and meet with the chairman and learn some boxing. He says I learned it all too fast so today we're going to train by repeating all the points in sparring. I can properly block so I can much more easily go against Choi Hyuk.

If I was in a boxing square I might have been able to corner Choi Hyuk into a corner and beat him up but there is no ring so it ends in a tie. But I did get beat on less.

“Whew, your whole body is so fit, you're overpowering me.”

“It's all thanks to your good teaching.”

“But to think that if you're beating me you can stop training, that's wrong. You are still far behind in skills.”

“Of course.”

It's only been a few days since learning, I would never think that.

“The first problem we have to overcome is in regards to the opponent's attack, not losing your rhythm. You have to halt your attack with stopping or you have to dodge with weaving, but since you only know blocking, you end up matching your rhythm to the opponent's attack.”

I nod my head. Then again, when I kept going in with sheer physicality, the general atmosphere of the sparring was from Choi Hyuk.

“Today, let's do some stopping.”

Stopping is a skill using a fist or arm to halt the opponent's attack movement while looking for an opportunity to attack.

I spend the day blocking or stopping Choi Hyuk's offense. I wanted to practice all day but Choi Hyuk got tired too fast (since he's human) so we couldn't practice for very long.

I think maybe it's all pointless, but today I can gauge how much I've improved in my fighting skill.

Schwick-bbuk!

“Gwek!”

I use Sylph to scour the mountainside and find a boar to fight against with my boxing.

A sharp punch.

With the proper motions I extend my fist and a sharp punch, and surprisingly, a very powerful gust of wind. I only used the divine protection of wind and it was enough to knock about the boar.

‘It wasn’t weak because the level is low, it was because my form was terrible.’

Of course, I’m sure some of it has to do with it being entry level 1.

When the boar rushes at me, I quickly jab and even have the sense to knock it off its front feet. It is because I learned the importance of using stopping to halt the opponent’s rhythm.

“Divine protection of fire.”

My attack with the wind and flame makes it all the more dangerous.

Kwa lu lung!

As I throw a powerful straight, the formidable sized boar faltered.

Stricken with fear, the boar turned around and raced off and I use that chance to run.

I use the divine protection of wind to leap forward and shorten the distance between us and then I kick the boar in the side.

Buk!

Kwang-!

“Gwek!”

I can feel from my foot the feeling of something shattering inside the boar.

The boar falls over and pants its breath in misery.

‘I’m sorry.’

After I express my condolences I use Sylph to use the wind daggers to finish it off.

‘I’ve definitely grown stronger!’

I gain confidence.

I don't even feel nervous because I was thinking that learning these things now wouldn't have an immediate effect.

But through the boar, I was able to verify that my attacks have improved from before. I am sure of it. If I continue to learn until the end of this rest period, I know I can keep getting stronger.

I didn't realize the time passing by as I put all my energy into practice and the day grows dark and I decide to slowly make my way back home.

'Tomorrow I go to Denmark.'

As for foreign travel, all I ever did was go to Beijing once after I was done in the army.

To think, I'm finally going to Europe, I'm full of excitement. Even more so, it's not just any old plane. It's chairman Park Jinseong's private jet!

Will the inside of the plane be like a hotel?

I have to hurry and pack my bags so I hurry back home to Cheonan. I've become used to driving and I slowly get immersed in driving my Porsche around everywhere.

For some odd reason, Hyun-ji is home early today but she's not alone.

“Hi, oppa!”

“Hello!”

An energetic greeting from two girls.

One of them is Min-jeong. And the other is the girl that was with them at the club last time. Hyun-ji's club friends have all gathered here.

“Hey 400 pointer, you going out partying again?”

At my question, Hyun-ji's face turns into the biggest frown. Min-jeong and her friend are laughing hysterically.

“Min-jeong said she'll make dinner.”

“Dinner?”

Min-jeong shines a bright smile and says.

“Oppa, you said you're going to Denmark tomorrow. So, I wanted to see you before you left.”

“Oppa, I really wanted to see you. I heard you got a job at a really nice place, that’s so cool! Oppa, I want to ride in your car too.”

What the fuck situation is this.

I just stare head on at Hyun-ji. Hyun-ji just sweats a cold sweat and pretends to be doing something else.

I mean, she kept going on about how I can’t date Min-jeong, but now she’s brought her over to our house?

“Just wait a little bit. The rice is all done.”

Min-jeong heads into the kitchen, singing to herself.

The other friend is asking me how I came to be employed at Jinseong Group, how much is my salary, is the car nice, a continuous barrage of materialistic questions. Ah, disillusionment.

I feel tired and get up from my seat.

“I have to get ready for my business trip tomorrow.”

“Okay, go ahead.”

I go into my room and pack the things I need tomorrow, my

passport and clothes, when Hyun-ji sneaks in.

“Oppa~”

“Not long ago, you told me to be careful about Min-jeong.”

“Aw, well you see. Min-jeong and even Ji-hyun were throwing a fit saying they want to come hang out at our house. Ji-hyun was nagging too about how she wanted to see you. And Min-jeong kept insisting she wanted to show me what she learned from cooking school and I couldn’t keep saying no...”

I look at Hyun-ji pathetically, and Hyun-ji hangs her head in shame.

I don’t know anymore.

Whatever happens, will happen.

Chapter 57 - Yoo Min-Jeong (Part 2)

Bibimbap, shredded daikon, minced meat pancakes, Min-jeong prepares a spread of all the various things she's cooked.

“Oh my gosh, oh my gosh, this is awesome! Did you really make all this?”

“You haven't been learning that long and you're already this good? I can only make ramen.”

Hyun-ji and Ji-hyun are amazed.

Well, honestly, it is nothing to be amazed at. It's just interesting because Min-jeong is cooking at all.

Min-jeong looks at me and smiles prettily.

“What do you think? Doesn't it look tasty?”

“Um, yeah. Can we eat it?”

“Of course. Everyone, eat.”

“It looks so good.”

“Thank you.”

It's a so-so meal.

Min-jeong's cooking isn't bad and there are a lot of side dishes that mom had made so it all made for a plentiful meal.

Maybe it is because of my physique. I'm so hungry I eat two bowls.

But Min-jeong sees me get that second bowl of rice from the rice cooker and her eyes twinkle at me. I feel like she feels like she's being my wife and it makes me sweat in nervousness. Min-jeong is now without reservations, hitting on me.

Hyun-ji and Ji-hyun in no way, didn't notice all this.

A weird atmosphere settles in the air so I change the subject. I will toss you girls a subject you can't ignore.

"Have you all decided where you'll be working?"

Hyun-ji and Ji-hyun flinch.

Surprisingly, Min-jeong remains calm and speaks.

"I've decided to go into the business my relative oppa set up."

I see.

That's how she was able to relax and study cooking during this time.

“I'm so jealous! Can you do anything for me?”

The friend, Ji-hyun, must have a lot of employment problems cause she's clinging to Min-jeong.

“Maybe? I'll ask him but it'll be difficult. It's a small venture company so it doesn't need that many employees. I got lucky because one accounting job became available. The pay isn't much either.”

“Aw, what am I going to do? I'm studying for the TOIEC but with this it won't be any help.”

“You guys, I'm getting threatened into getting the family fried chicken business!”

Hyun-ji starts to throw a tantrum.

Hmm, this sure brought a result.

I leave the three to chat and head into my room to pack my bag.

I don't have a lot of things to take and I'm able to fit everything into one Boston bag. I get everything organized much easier than I thought I would, so I got my laptop and get on the internet.

He said the Nordic Exam Group headquarters is in Copenhagen, Denmark. I think there might be some time after we finish our business and I can get in some tourism so I decide to research some tourist destinations.

“Oppa, they're leaving.”

It's time for Hyun-ji's two friends to return home so I go to say goodbye in the entryway. And then, Min-jeong suddenly asks me.

“Oppa, can you escort me home?”

“Oh, right! Me too! I want to ride in the Porsche!”

Ji-hyun clings on too.

Min-jeong did make dinner so I can't not take her home either.

Hyun-ji finds it all a nuisance and decides to stay home, so I take the two girls to the car to take them home. The two people take in the luxurious interior of the car and are amazed.

I turn over the engine and Min-jeong speaks.

“Ji-hyun’s house is closer so let’s go there first.”

Ji-hyun full on stares at Min-jeong. Min-jeong just taps Ji-hyun’s hand. Maybe their stare was an exchanging of a whole story because Ji-hyun just giggles to herself.

“Thank you!”

I drop off Ji-hyun and input into my GPS navigation while I ask Min-jeong.

“Where’s your house?”

“Ahnsung blank-blank efficiency apartment.”

I put in the address she gives me and realize that it’s right in front of Hyun-ji’s school. It’s only ten minutes from our house.

I now realize why Ji-hyun was giggling to herself earlier. Min-jeong told me to drop off Ji-hyun first so that she could be alone with me.

The atmosphere turns weird again.

“Your place is in front of the school?”

“My house is in Seoul but I’m living here alone because the

school is in Cheonan.”

“ ... ”

That strange feeling I get when she says she lives alone is just probably my own over thinking. I don't really have anything else to say so I just turn the car.

Min-jeong and I both don't say a word. It feels awkward which in turn makes me nervous.

We arrive in front of the efficiency apartment that Min-jeong lives at.

“We're here.”

Min-jeong nods her head and gets out the car.

But lo and behold, she opens the passenger car door and sits next to me. Then she just stares at me.

“What, what?”

“Oppa, what are you so afraid of?”

“Huh?”

I felt for sure that question was supposed to catch me off guard. Cause the next second, Min-jeong's lips overtake mine.

After strongly indulging in my lips, she slightly draws back and looks me right in the eyes. We have maybe 10 cm between us? One pair of eyes stare into my soul.

“Oppa, it's not like you don't like me.”

I don't even have a chance to say anything back. Her lips are on top of my lips again.

She touches and pushes and slightly bites and the whole feeling is actually very tender. From her lips to mine, I can feel her sweetness.

She grabs my neck with one hand, and with the other hand she grazes my thigh, all while deliberately kiss attacking me.

The reason the kiss can be so long is because I don't resist and just innocently receive it all.

I have no idea how much time has passed.

The life suffocating kiss is done.

With a slightly flushed face, Min-jeong looks at me lovingly.

“Remember what I said? That I live alone.”

“ ... ”

“You must be tired. Come in for some coffee.”

I park my car in the efficiency apartment underground parking lot and get dragged by Min-jeong’s hands and go up together.

If I go up, I’m sure a more exhausting situation will happen, but it doesn’t matter. I decide to just not think this through.

As soon as we get to her place we dig into each other.

We kiss and our tongues wrap around each other. Min-jeong takes off my shirt, and I lift her and put her on the bed. While I take off my pants, she takes off her clothes too.

Her seductive pale body in nothing but black lingerie excites me.

I get an excitement like all the blood is rushing to my brain and melting it.

Reason is no longer within my head.

Underneath the bed, two people's clothes are messily strewn about.

Min-jeong is tucked cutely underneath the sheets and she smiled wryly as she touched my body. With a delicate touch, she stroked my chest and my abs.

I want to get under the sheets with her, but with Min-jeong's firm request to see my body, I have to remain under the light, baring my body.

I make the same request and she says she can't because she's embarrassed. I feel a little annoyed by her hiding under the sheets alone, but her cuteness trumps it.

“It must be so hard to get a body like this.”

“Well.”

“I've never even seen a body this great on TV.”

Min-jeong touches my good-to-look-at perfect abs and is intrigued.

I got this body through a karma prize, not through hard work, and it pokes at my integrity a little.

‘But now what?’

The revolution is over and so is the regret and slowly, reason returns to me.

I am but a man and when Min-jeong came onto me without abandon, I didn't say no, I just let it all happen.

But now I'm trying to figure out how to correct our relationship.

“Min-jeong.”

“Yes, Min-jeong is here.”

She says as she gets snuggled up to me. Who would say she isn't friends with Hyun-ji, because she too has a plethora of aegyo.

“Do you sincerely like me?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Why?”

“Good car, good job, good body, good personality.”

“...”

It's such a blunt response I temporarily am at a loss for words, but Min-jeong just looks at me and laughs.

"I'm joking."

"I don't think it was all a joke."

Min-jeong giggles.

"That's not all."

"Then?"

"That night, I saw it all. You and those men."

That second, my body becomes rigid with tension.

"You saw?"

"Yeah. I was worried for you so I stayed back and watched. I was going to call the police if they hurt you. I couldn't hear, but those people, they were from Jinseong Group, right?"

"Yeah."

"The chairman was saying something and you just downright refused."

“I did.”

“After I saw that, I went head over heels for you.”

“Because those people were from Jinseong Group?”

“Nothing like that.”

“Then what?”

“I got the feeling you were a person doing something important. That’s when I fell for you. I could only think of you and all other guys just felt so trivial.”

“...”

“I can’t tell you I’ve lived my life modestly but that doesn’t mean I started hitting on you with a light heart.”

“...I don’t like party girls.”

“I don’t party anymore. After I graduate and start working, I can’t be a kid like that anymore.”

If only Hyun-ji would think like this too.

“I can’t promise you anything.”

“You don’t have to promise me anything. I just like you, oppa.”

I look at Min-jeong.

Unlike her usual playful and foxy self, she’s sincere.

I don’t know.

I don’t know when I’ll die, and I’m interested in Min-jeong but I don’t really like her in that way. It might be a relationship that who knows, when it will end.

But still, if she wants it, that’s not bad either.

It’s a little selfish, but living a life where I don’t know when it will end, having a girl I can meet would be nice. She’s pretty and takes care of herself (dresses well) and has aegyo, Min-jeong is plenty worthy.

I grab the blanket that is hiding Min-jeong. And she in turn grabs it tight when she says.

“If you don’t answer, I won’t let you anymore.”

Instead of an answer, I give her a kiss.

“Okay, let’s date. I don’t know how this will go, but let’s try.”

At my words, Min-jeong smiles.

“Oppa, it’ll probably last a lot longer than you think. Didn’t I mention it before?”

She takes the sheets off.

A gorgeous woman lies before me and she continues.

“Missing me so much you’ll go crazy, stepping on eggshells in case I’m mad, getting ecstatic when I do something small.”

She grabs my head with both hands and guides it to her cushiony breasts.

“That’s how all men who date me end up. There’s no point in anything else.”

When I get back home, it’s 2 am.

Neither mom or noona care that I was out so late. Because I’m not Hyun-ji.

I go into my room and play a game on my smartphone when Hyun-ji comes in with glaring goblin eyes.

“What were you doing out so late?”

“I was exercising.”

“Oh ho, exercise? Yeah, I’m sure you sweat a ton.”

At Hyun-ji’s sarcasm, I flinch.

‘Does she know?’

But of course. Hyun-ji shows me her smartphone screen.

[Min-jeong: hey, sister in law~ I’ll be really good~ >v<]

“I told you so many times and finally, you got reeled in by that fox, and now you’ve “exercised” together, have you? Was it good?”

“Uh haha! Dear child, let’s not exchange uncomfortable talk between siblings.”

“Wow, so you did do something that would be uncomfortable to talk about between siblings? Good for you!”

Dis bitch?

The day has finally come when I'm getting scolded from Hyun-ji.

“Now do you know how I felt when I went looking for you at that club? What? Your hand couldn't let go? You must've had a lot of fun with that dick!”

“Why are you bringing that up again!”

We bicker and argue at and that and at the fuss, mom wakes up and with one eye open, pokes her head into my room.

“Why are you guys fighting at this hour?”

“Mom! Oh my gosh...!”

“What!”

Hyun-ji babbles on with every little detail and tattles on me to mom.

After hearing it all, mom looks at me, then approaches me and puts her hand on my shoulder.

“Son, good job.”

“No need.”

“What do you mean, good job!”

Mom explains to Hyun-ji who is in a fit.

“Hyun-ji, I don’t care how, but I’m happy for it. No matter what accident your brother has, if he gets me a grandchild in my arms, I don’t care.”

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

At mom’s declaration, we both are at a loss for words

Chapter 58 - Copenhagen (Part 1)

I received contact from chairman Park Jinseong to get to Gimpo airport by 11 am.

Thanks to that I have some time left over in my morning and I take Hyun-ji to school.

“Oppa!”

As soon as I stop the car and drop her off, there’s a girl that opens my passenger door and sits herself down in its seat.

With long black hair and impressionable double eyelids, a happy 23-year old college student (in American age, this is 22.)

It’s the girl that I started dating yesterday, Yoo Min-Jeong.

“You’re going to Denmark today, right? Aww, what will I do, I won’t be able to see you for a while?”

Seeing the adorable Min-Jeong, I am reminded of the sweet time we had last night and my heart is happy.

“I see you’re both just getting along so well!”

Finding all this ridiculous, Hyun-ji looked at us, at her wit’s end. Whether she stares or not, Min-Jeong brazenly sticks herself closer

to me. Hyun-ji looks like she's about to rage.

"I don't know when I'll be back. When I get back, I'll call you first."

"You won't go cheat or anything?"

"Of course not. I don't even have the skills to do that."

"Okay, you can't get all excited that you're in Europe and go have a fling with some blonde, okay?"

"Don't worry, I don't like blondes."

"Then?"

Instead of an answer, I stroke back Min-Jeong's hair. Min-Jeong smiled and got even closer to me.

"You'll be late for class, bitch!"

Maybe it hurt her eyes to see us, because Hyun-ji is annoyed to the max. But instead, Min-Jeong just closes the door. Then she opens her window and speaks.

"I'm going to skip morning classes, sub in for me!"

“What?”

“Please and thank you, sister-in-law! Okay, oppa, let’s go! Hurry, hurry!”

I do as I’m told and start the car. I can see Hyun-ji throwing a fit through my rear view mirror. Min-Jeong is giggling next to me. I laugh too.

“Oppa, what should we do?”

I take out my smartphone and check the time. It’s not 9am.

“Did you eat breakfast?”

“No. I have lectures starting at 9 am and I woke up late today.”

“Then let’s go eat something tasty. Know anywhere good?”

“There’s a pasta shop in front of school.”

“Okay, we’ll go there.”

We go to the shopping district in front of the school and park on the street and get out.

The gaze of passing students rests on me as I get out of the driver

seat. It is the power of the Porsche Cayenne. It's not a flashy sports car, but still, it's rare to see in front of a college.

Min-Jeong quickly got out of the car and stands right next to me.

It's an action like she's marking me as hers.

The passing students look super annoyed by it. The poor students that have received mental damage early in the morning move on by at a faster pace.

"Keep doing that and you'll be an outcast."

"Doesn't matter. I'm graduating soon anyway."

She's so bright like she's on drugs and her good mood rubs off on me and makes me feel good too.

We eat together when Min-Jeong suddenly grabbed my wrist and speaks.

"Oppa, do you not have a watch?"

"Yeah."

"A working man should have a wrist watch."

“Really? I guess I should buy one.”

Actually, I have a beat up digital watch I used in the army at home. They were being sold for \$10 in front of the army base but I don't wear them because I don't like how it looks.

“Oppa, can I get you one as a present?”

“It's okay. Since I'm going abroad, I'll get one at an airport shop.”

I have a million dollars in my bank. There's no need to use an almost-graduated college girl's budget.

“How expensive are you going to get?”

“Hmm, I don't know. I have enough money so I'll take a big bite and get a good one.”

“Give me a figure. I'll pick it out for you!”

“You will?”

“Yeah, I'll search online and pick a few and message the options to you.”

“Hmm, well.”

“No?”

Min-Jeong makes a cute expression. Her eyes are dewy like the eyes of a bunny rabbit. I have no doubt that she knows her double eyelids are beautiful.

‘Makes me wonder. How much do I say?’

Tens of thousands of dollars wouldn’t be a burden at all. But if I name a number that high she might faint and find it strange. But I have all this money and I don’t want a cheap one either...

“\$5000?” (USD)

“Really?”

“Yeah, I’ll wear it forever so I should go big.”

“Am I picking out something that will be wrapped on your wrist forever?”

“Exactly. So you have to pick well.”

“Hehe, just leave it to me.”

Shopping is definitely for girls, because Min-Jeong’s eyes glow

with determination.

We finished our meal and drink some coffee at the café next door and chit chat about this and that. Min-Jeong has an endless list of things to talk about and she never stops talking.

It's time for us to part so we get in the car and I take her back to school when Min-Jeong suddenly says,

“Oppa, tell me one wish of yours.”

“A wish?”

“Whatever it is, I'll grant one wish.”

“You really, mean, like, whatever?”

“Yes, in the spirit of wishing you a good trip. Threes also the meaning of not having you cheat while you're over there.”

“Psh, cheating. Anyway, a wish...”

Wish.

She'll grant it no matter what it is.

A bunch of dirty thoughts dance across my mind. Due to Min-

Jeong's provocative stare, even more lustful thoughts abound. And we are right in front of the school which means her efficiency apartment is right nearby.

‘No, no, I shouldn’t.’

I control my desperate urges. We had relations on the day we decided to date. The pace is already fast enough and if we do it again here, I feel like I'll be pushing too much with Min-Jeong.

“Give me a kiss.”

“Pft, scaredy-cat.”

That upsets me.

“Should I change my wish now then?”

“You can’t.”

Min-Jeong giggled as she approaches me for a kiss. We meet our lips together and share a breath and affectionately caress each other's tongues. My body warms up and Min-Jeong and I both, with a little disappointment, part.

“I'm going to head back to class now. I think Hyun-ji's going to be mad.”

“Okay, I’ll see you when I get back.”

“Let’s chat on video chats.”

“Okay.”

Min-Jeong goes into her school and I head back home. I changed my clothes and grab my Boston bag stuffed with my things and head in the direction of Gimpo airport.

Speaking of, Gimpo airport is in a full ruckus.

“Chairman, what is your reason for going abroad to Denmark?”

“Are you planning on returning to work?”

“Is it true you have a health problem?”

“Chairman!”

“Chairman! An answer, please...!”

The reporters are bustling like a swarm of ants with a flurry of questions. The flash goes off from all different directions, all aimed at chairman Park Jinseong’s face.

The guards blocked off the reporters that keep swarming in like bees and forge a path.

With the path that they barely carved out, chairman Park Jinseong calmly walked through. Next to him is the 3rd office secretary Lee Jung-shik and me too.

Being next to chairman Park Jinseong, my face will probably end up in the papers too.

‘Mom, I think I’ll be on the 9 o’clock news.’

Like it’ll only be on the news.

At this rate, my face will be on the front pages of newspapers.

When I get on chairman Park Jinseong’s personal use Boeing 737, I don’t even have the time to take in the grand interior that I can’t even believe is the inside of a plane, before I collapse into the nearest chair.

I sat on a sofa in front of a coffee table and lean my body back.

The first attack of reporters I’ve ever experienced in my life was a shock.

They were questions for chairman Park Jinseong, but just by

standing next to him, I was more nervous. I feel as if I was group lynched.

‘He’s lived his life being subjected to this kind of thing.’

I admire chairman Park Jinseong for having held a straight face, without changing, in front of all those reporters.

I was briefly able to experience what a huge pressure it is to have any interest from others.

Chairman Park Jinseong looks exhausted from it too.

He sat on the sofa across from me and extended his hand to me.

“Whew, I am exhausted. Give me one of those.”

It is obvious what ‘one of those’ things chairman Park Jinseong is referring to.

“Yes.”

I make a flame of life and hand it to him. Chairman Park Jinseong swallowed the flame in one gulp and it must give him a surge of energy because he smiled happily.

“This is why I didn’t ask for it when I saw you this morning. It’s

more dramatic to eat it after the bustle.”

“Haha...”

“Ugh, I am so thirsty. Go bring something to drink.”

As soon as chairman Park Jinseong flicked his finger, a stewardess quickly fetches him some orange juice.

She’s maybe late 20’s?

With a tidy appearance and cute impression, the stewardess asked me.

“Can I get you anything to drink?”

“Yes, coffee please.”

“What kind of coffee should I get you?”

“An iced Americano.”

“Okay, please wait one moment.”

The stewardess quickly got me an iced Americano. I am moved by this experience as I drink my coffee.

‘How could the inside of a plane be this comfortable.’

Before I came, I searched for ‘Jinseong Group chairman private jet’ online.

‘It said there are sleeping quarters and an office obviously and even a gym.’

I really want to take a look around.

But more importantly than that, I should change into more comfortable clothes. The suit I am wearing right now is indeed uncomfortable.

“Chairman, is it okay if I change?”

“Do what you want. But...”

Chairman Park Jinseong looks me up and down.

“Why are you wearing such a cheap suit? You’ve got loads of money now.”

“I don’t really have an interest in clothes.”

“You don’t have a watch on your wrist, your hairstyle is that,

you're a young guy, why not care about how you look?"

"Is it that weird?"

Receiving this scolding, I scratched my head.

Chairman Park Jinseong spoke.

"You are going to meet people for official business. Do you want to look unimportant to these people?"

"Um, no."

"Not only that but you are only a 3rd turn examinee so to them, you will look all the more pitiful, so if you look like you do now, that will only make it worse. When we get to Copenhagen, go shopping first."

"Okay, I will."

"Also, you can't speak English?"

"No..."

"Ugh!"

Chairman Park Jinseong grabbed the back of his neck.

“Oh goodness, sometimes when I see you, I get angry. When I was your age, I lived and worked so hard...!”

“I’m sorry. Please calm down.”

“You are as the saying goes, disease giving, cure giving.”

Chairman Park Jinseong once again flicked his fingers and called over the stewardess.

“Yes?”

The stewardess from before approached.

“Young lady, what is your name?”

“It is Lee Soo-hyun, chairman.”

“Take this fellow shopping in Copenhagen. Starting with hairstyle, from head to toe, fix him up, got it?”

Stewardess Lee Soo-hyun looks me up and down.

In embarrassment, I hang my head low. Perhaps Lee Soo-hyun finds me doing this to be funny because she smiles and says.

“Understood, chairman.”

Having been pegged as a fool, I mumbled to myself in my head and changed into more comfortable clothes. Jeans and a t shirt, a cardigan, a blazer, and sneakers is what I changed into and he must not like it very much because chairman Park Jinseong tsk tsks his tongue.

‘Oh like you dress all that well... damn, that watch looks nice.’

I looked at his shiny wristwatch and am back to admiring him.

After about 12 hours in flight, we arrive at the Copenhagen airport. Current time zone time is 4 in the afternoon.

Chairman Park Jinseong moved separately so he could be seen for foreign business reasons.

I was left alone at the airport like a missing child and I felt anxious when stewardess Lee soo-hyun came to escort me.

“Come this way.”

“Okay.”

I tagged along behind Lee Soo-hyun like a baby chick.

Lee Soo-hyun took me outside the airport and we got into a cab. The middle aged taxi driver and her conversation, I understood none of it.

I looked out the window as we rode in the taxi and I blankly stared at the strange landscape and the strange people.

Copenhagen.

My first step onto European soil.

Chapter 59 - Copenhagen (Part 2)

We drove for about 20 minutes in the taxi and we arrived at a street in the center of Copenhagen.

“This is [Stroget](#).”

Stewardess Lee Soo-hyun kindly explained this place to me.

Being the longest pedestrian street in Europe, it is also the center of shopping in Copenhagen. The word stroget itself means ‘to walk’ in Danish.

It is strewn with old buildings and the whole street looks ancient. I felt as if I could be delusional that I am in the 1800’s.

I followed Lee Soo-hyun around and started touring and shopping.

Lee Soo-hyun began to do as she was instructed, changing me from head to toe.

She searched for a hair salon on her phone and we start by getting me a fresh haircut and then she dragged me around to brand name stores where I get a two button suit and a shirt and dress shoes. I end up holding a bunch of bags in both hands full of plain clothes too.

Suddenly I get a text on my roaming cell phone.

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Oppa! I picked one. I picked a relatively lower price one that is really sturdy. I couldn't pull the trigger on such a large purchase so I couldn't get a really expensive one. πππ]

In the picture that Min-jeong has sent me is a \$1000 Swiss brand wrist watch. It's definitely a brand known for its strength.

‘That’s unexpected.

I smile.

I thought she would be excited and buy an expensive luxury brand, but she does have economic taste.

I send her a response.

[Me: Okay, I’m on my way to go buy it now!]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Buy it and send me a picture]

[Me: Mm]

Perhaps it is the alley of shopping because that watch brand is also nearby. Of course, I buy the watch with my own money.

Thinking of, the price of all the clothes we just bought must be a handful.

“Is the chairman buying all of these things for me?”

“Yes, it is not my card so do not worry.”

Lee Soo-hyun said that and smiled. She’s not as cute as Min-jeong, but still a cute girl.

The luxury brand suit is definitely different, just by wearing it. I used to think suits were supposed to be uncomfortable, but now, wearing a suit that is tailored to my body, it is more comfortable than anything.

‘This is me!’

I admired the reflection of me in the full body mirror.

Is it due to the physical strength buff?

Firm shoulders and a fatless midsection, slender waist and long and strong legs are accentuated by the well fitted suit.

Such incredible detail, this moment is the coolest moment of my life.

“You really look completely different.”

I felt that Lee Soo-hyun, too, is admiring me.

“You picked out really good clothes for me. How can I repay you for your hard work?”

“No need. You have such a good body, it was fun.”

The day somehow is gone and now is now 7 pm.

The meeting time is coming up and I have to be on my way.

We came out of the stroget street and got into a taxi and headed towards the hotel.

Lee Soo-hyun checked in at the front desk and handed me a key card. On the card is written NO. 2001. I think it means it's on the 20th floor.

Lee Soo-hyun took me to the restaurant on the hotel basement level 1 and said goodbye.

“If you wait here, the others will arrive here for the meeting.”

“Are you going back?”

“Yes, I checked into this hotel. Well then.”

Lee Soo-hyun then respectfully bowed before disappearing.

‘Ah...’

A little disappointing.

It’s not like I have developed feelings for her. I am surrounded in all directions by foreigners speaking a foreign language!

“Hyun-ho Kim?”

Suddenly, a male restaurant employee approached me and asked me.

The employee kept saying something to me.

The employee takes me to a room in the far corner of the restaurant.

He knocks and a young man’s voice is heard.

“You may come in.”

I’m completely shocked.

It's not Korean.

No, it is a language that does exist in this world. But it the only other language I know.

‘It's the Arena's language!’

It's the language they were speaking in the village in the forest. The man in the room is an examinee like me.

I open the door and go in.

“Nice to meet you.”

A blonde and handsome man.

I thought to myself that there couldn't be a man more suited to the image of a high born gentleman.

He looked a little bit older than me. Of course, Westerners do look older so I can't judge before he tells me.

“I am examinee Kim Hyun-ho.”

“I am Odin.”

Odin?

The Odin from the Northern European legends?

“Is that like a code name?”

“Haha, yes. It is also the name I use in the Arena.”

“I see. I will call you Odin.”

“Sounds good. Anyway, I heard about your predicament from the chairman. You are now but a 3rd turn examinee, a sad situation has befallen you.”

“Yes.”

“Assisting you will be easy and difficult.”

He spoke ambiguously.

I don't want to be caught in his words.

“When you say easy, you mean is that because I am a 3rd turn examinee, this level will not be difficult to you in your position?”

“Yes. Then what do you think will be the difficult part?”

The baby angel is like this too, there sure are a lot of those who like quizzes.

“It’s probably because you don’t know what kind of exam the 4th exam will be.”

“That’s correct.”

Odin looked proud of my answer and nodded at me.

“But do not despair because of that. I want to help you no matter how.”

Is it because of the price chairman Park Jin-seong will pay him?

I wonder.

The money paid for his aid will be 10 million dollars.

But I somehow get the feeling that to this guy, 10 million bucks isn’t that big a deal.

It’s because I sense his means from his behavior and speech.

Even for carrying the heavy burden of being an examinee, he doesn’t show it at all and exudes an atmosphere of being a

magnate/important figure.

“I am an 18th turn examinee.”

18th turn?

That’s a surprise.

That means he’s lower than Yoo Ji-soo’s team that had passed the 19th turn.

Is he not as grand as I assumed him to be?

“And I have never had an instance of failing an exam.”

“Ah!”

Then the story is different.

He has never bore the penalty of a failure, and received a prize at every success, he is bound to be a very powerful examinee.

“The place you are at in the Arena is probably the Forest of the Dead and brown mountain border.”

“The Forest of the Dead? That forest is the Forest of the Dead?”

“Recently it has been called that. It is said that no one who goes into that forest returns alive. A good and skilled adventurer nor a beast hunting mercenary have ever returned, time and time again, and it has begun to be called that.”

Cannot return?

That moment, I recall the silver clan.

“Is it the ranch...”

“Ranch?”

I carelessly mumbled under my breath and it peaks Odin’s curiosity.

It’s not really anything I have to hide so I tell him what happened in my 3rd turn exam.

Odin’s face freezes over.

“Those were really lycanthropes?”

“Yes. They were bastards with silver hair.”

“That is definitely not your average lycanthrope. I can see how

the Korean Arena Research Center miscalculated on that one.”

I listened to Odin’s continuing explanation.

“Lycanthropes have the same intellect as human and can even change into human form. Just listening to these points, wouldn’t you say they make a powerful threat against humans?”

“Yes, indeed.”

I agreed.

What if they changed into their human forms and infiltrated human society?

What if they live in the shadows of human society and breed and grow in numbers?

Thinking along these lines, lycanthropes have the biggest chance of being a threat than any other beast or monster.

“But lycanthropes are not as dangerous a monster as we think. Do you know why?”

I thought back to the silver clan leader, Leon.

He pitted us into a mental fight, using a bow and arrow to fight

us.

As I thought about Leon Silver, I think I know the answer.

“They reject human culture and adaptations to life and instead favor their bestial instincts? Usually...”

“Haha!”

Odin lets out a refreshing laugh.

“Am I wrong?”

“Not one bit. That is entirely the answer. You are really smart.”

I am relieved.

I am glad that, in the least, I do not appear a useless rookie with no point in helping.

“Anyhow, hearing your story, I can kind of guess what your next exam will be.”

“I am all ears.”

“There is a high chance the exam will be related to the silver clan.”

“...?”

Even though I have already escaped the Forest of Death?

Would I get another exam where I have to go back into the forest and fight the silver clan?

“What was your first exam?”

“It was an exam to kill a red ape.”

“And your second exam?”

“... to survive a week from the red ape clan.”

“That’s usually how it goes. It usually doesn’t end in one exam, but there’s a lot of instances of continuing the exam in the next one. They’re like relations.”

“...?”

“It’s not like meeting someone and then parting means a relationship is over. Exams are the same.”

Relationships... He is a Caucasian who knows the Asian culture well.

“Then the story is simple. You don’t know what the 4th exam will be but I will give you two kinds of aid.”

“Please continue.”

“First, I will send the army to suppress the silver clan.”

“...What?”

Army?

Did I just hear that wrong?

Odin just smiles.

“I will confess that my introduction was inadequate. I am Count Hans Odin.”

‘A count!’

I am in shock and my mouth gapes open.

Impressively, Odin has attained royalty status in the Arena. He has attained the noble title of count and people and things to govern.

Then I recall the ‘ranch’ again.

“I am sorry but the person who raised the high taxes there...”

“Oh, goodness no.”

Odin raises his hand and adamantly shook it.

“That is the story of a neighboring domain’s Bastian. I do not do disgraceful things like that.

“I apologize.”

“No need. Amongst examinees, there are plenty of those bastards that treat the Arena people as mere bugs.”

That hits me in a delicate spot.

In order to clear my exam, there was that time I sacrificed the whole village people as bait.

“There are evil shit people who kill people and retrieve majeong from those lives. It’s particularly bad in China. They’re crazy for money.”

“Um, people have majeong too?”

I am startled and ask.

Odin spoke.

“Of course they do. People are one of many living creatures that carry a lot of mana. That mana clumps together and therefore they have majeong.”

Odin is enraged as he made a passionate speech.

“China’s country level next generation energy source majeong accrument pushes for it they encouraged their arena examinees to kill people and get more majeong.

“The Chinese people are making a mistake. Right now they are doing shit like that and gathering a lot of majeong, but eventually they are taking strong examinees and turning and growing them into murderers.”

They do that?

I get a terrifying feeling.

Using karma prizes to get stronger powers, an examinee murdering and that becoming normal, all in order for profit, how will that end up?

“Our conversation got distracted. So, I will send an army and

suppress the lycanthropes.”

“Thank you.”

“And the other thing, it will be good to present to you with a useful gift.”

Chapter 60 - Copenhagen (Part 3)

“Equip.”

As he does so, a very thin and black glove appears on his hand.

He takes it off and hands it to me.

“It should prove useful.”

He’s giving it to me so I don’t hesitate to take it.

I touch it and it feels strange. Its soft like silk but also feels strong like metal.

Even so, it has a strange feeling of sticking to my skin too.

“It is a glove weaved from the web of Arachne.”

“Arachne?”

I think I’ve seen it in the illustrated guide from the Korean arena research center. A gigantic beastly spider.

“It is a glove made by processing magic to mitigate the sticky viscosity of the web. Because it was made with magic it is expensive but it is good enough to withstand knife cuts.

“Ah...”

“It’s good for bare handed fighting and also for holding weapons. It does have a unique viscosity so whatever you are holding in your hand won’t easily be let go.”

I listen to his explanation and scan the gloves.

“For the item explanation, you can look on the board.”

Odin makes the suggestion.

Like he said, I retrieve my board and say the following.

“Explain this glove to me.”

Then the words on the board wiggle and change.

-Arachne’s Glove: it is a glove made with magic and sewn from Arachne’s web. It protects the hand with strong durability. It is weak to fire and aura.

Having been learning boxing, this item is very beneficial to me. How much would this item cost in karma?

“Thank you.”

“This may be sufficient enough but who knows. You may receive an exam that is different from my prediction of it being related to lycanthropes.”

“What should I do then?”

“It doesn’t matter if you fail so survive no matter what.”

Odin speaks firmly.

“If you survive, I will help you with your failed mission in the fifth exam. You can get the same exam you’ve failed at before so the second time around I will be of more help to you.”

“Um, can I ask you something?”

“Of course.”

“Why are you helping me?”

There is of course, the 10 million dollars that chairman Park Jinseong is offering.

But no matter how I look at it, Odin doesn’t seem the kind of man

that would act for 10 million.

With an identity as an examinee that has also become a lord in the arena.

With skills like that, regardless of which country's agency he affiliates with, he could probably make that.

“Why do you think?”

“...”

Odin gives me yet another quiz question.

‘Fine, if you want a quiz, I’ll answer.’

I think it over carefully.

He has received a request from chairman Park Jinseong.

Chairman Park Jinseong is probably sponsoring and supporting and building relationships with not only the Nordic exam time, but also the Korean Arena research center and other national agencies. He is that invested in curing his disease.

Is it because as a sponsor, he cannot refuse chairman Park Jinseong’s request?

‘No, that isn’t it.’

With an examinee as great as Odin, even against the great chairman Park Jinseong, the power dynamic is changed.

Because the one in greater need then would be chairman Park Jinseong.

Odin doesn’t need chairman Park Jinseong’s best bargaining tool, money.

‘Then...’

As I keep thinking about chairman Park Jinseong, one answer comes to mind.

“I’m sorry, do you have someone in your family who is ill?”

Odin smiles.

“Mr. Hyun-ho Kim, I do think our continued relationship will be a good one. And I wish for that too.”

I realize I answered correctly.

“Isn’t it funny?”

“What do you mean?”

“A different world, an angel, exams, karma, everything is unrealistic, but for examinees like us or chairman Park Jinseong who isn’t an examinee, and even... my daughter who is still so young, it all boils down to the desire to live, and that is the only logic of all worlds.”

“Your daughter...”

“It is not serious yet. But it is the same thing that first took my wife from this world.”

“...”

It must be a genetic disease. I don’t dig for more and Odin spares his words on it.

Odin gives me a phone number.

“Call when you need it.”

“I will.”

And with that we part ways.

I take the elevator and head up to the 20th floor.

When I reach the hallway, I am surprised.

There are only four doors that I can see. Even though this is a very large hotel that should have lots of rooms every floor.

Could it be?

I use my key card and open the door and go inside.

...I see the expansive interior of a suite.

Chairman Park Jinseong has booked me a suite as my lodgings.

I'm sure someone below him made the arrangements but it means he regards me as this important.

I have a wonderful view of Copenhagen that I can see stretching below my terrace where there is a pretty tea table set up.

I put away in the closet the clothes that I bought earlier from shopping with lee soo-hyun, and I take out comfortable training gear from my Boston bag and change into them.

I am about to put away the suit when I feel something in the inside pocket.

I put my hand in and there is a small and delicately folded piece of paper.

Written in a water based pen, is a pretty and feminine handwriting.

[Lee Soo-hyung 010-****-****]

‘Woah.’

What the!

That famous, legendary, what I thought would never occur in my life...

‘Did I just get hit on? By the personal flight attendant?’

I think about Lee soo-hyun.

Stewardess to the Jinseong Group chairman’s private jet. When we were shopping she had good taste in luxury and she is a capable person, having mastered many languages.

I got hit on by a woman like that! Never did I think in my 29 years of life this would happen!

I am moved greatly by this and take a picture with my smartphone camera and message it to Min-jeong. Proof shot!

[Me; this is how great oppa is.]

The response is immediate.

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: (angry emoticon) What is this! That bitch!]

With the angry emoticon and her furious reaction, Min-jeong is so cute.

I laugh and continue to text her.

[Me: Ah, a lonely night in Copenhagen. I'm so lonely, I think I will fall to seduction]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: No! Don't be seduced πππ]

[Me: Then appeal to me with your charms so I'm not shaken. I'm waiting^^]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Just one sec!]

Then Min-jeong sends me a cute selfie. Her smiling face is cute, but this isn't sufficient.

[Me: this is all?]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: aren't I cute?]

[Me: you thought cute would be enough...]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: -_-^ Hold on]

From then on, Min-jeong sends me selfies, each time, with one item of clothing removed.

‘Woah!’

Lastly, an excellent picture arrives. She must be feeling shy about it herself because she has her face about half covered with her hand.

Just looking at it makes me dizzy so much I may get a nosebleed.

I'm deeply immersed in the picture when Min-jeong shoots me another text.

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: I'm going to tattle on you to Hyun-ji ππ]

[Me: Crap -_-]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: I am so ashamed I can no longer live as a

woman]

[Me: Why are you like this all of a sudden -_-]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: I'm going to tell her you threatened me and forced me to take erotic pictures]

[Me: Don't do that! What is it you want?]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: You send the same pictures too, oppa]

[Me:...]

Darn, I had forgotten what kind of woman my adversary is.

That night, I go through some unsettling (?) times.

-Oppa, wake up. It's 7 am.

At the sound of Min-jeong's voice, I barely wake up.

Through the curtains and open window, warm sunlight bathes me.

On my charging smartphone placed on the nightstand next to the bed, I can see Min-jeong's face.

-Oppa~ good morning

Min-jeong's face is happy and bright and smiling.

‘Oh, right.’

Min-jeong said she wanted to monitor me whilst I sleep so we used the Wi-Fi to while I slept with the video chat on.

She did it in case I went cheating on her with Lee Soo-hyun.

“Yeah, good morning, what are you doing?”

-I was just watching your sleeping face.

“For seven hours?”

-Yep, aren't I devoted?

“...”

-Haha, I was studying.

“Studying?”

-For cooking. I’m going to make you lots of yummy things.

How is it she just says all the right things.

“I thought you were just cosplaying being a nice girl, but you’re really trying hard.”

At the mention of cosplay, Min-jeong laughs.

-I did start it to look good to you, but it turns out it’s really fun.

“You’ll be a good wife.”

-You want to take me?

“Woah now, I don’t know yet. I’m an expensive man.”

-Hmph.

Min-jeong pouts out her lip.

“But I will bring you presents. Is there anything you want?”

As I say so, Min-jeong’s face brightens up.

-There is!

“What?”

-A really good kitchen knife set please.

“Kitchen knives?”

-Kitchen knives are really expensive. But it really does make a difference, a good one versus a bad one.

“... Min-jeong.”

-Yes?

“Stop pretending to be modest and speak honestly. Do you want a bag?”

Min-jeong laughs hysterically.

But she insists on the kitchen knife set to the end.

I can't tell if she's actually changed into a modest woman or still acting to appeal to me.

I finish the video chat and call chairman Park Jinseong.

-Are you done with all your business? Shall we head back then?

“What? Please, give me some time for the touristy stuff. I did come all the way to Copenhagen after all.”

-What's there to see in Copenhagen? Just go to Spain later instead.

“I have to give you the flame of life every day, how will I go to Spain?”

-Oh, right, there's that. Fine, then I'll see you at 8 in front of the hotel.

“You're going to let me tour?”

-Alright, I'll show you one important spot in Copenhagen before we head back.

“... okay.”

I adequately shower and change into the clothes I bought yesterday and head downstairs.

It turns to 8 am and right on the dot, chairman Park Jinseong

appears.

He comes with a couple of his guards and nods to me.

“Let’s go.”

“Yes.”

“Only a bumpkin would be a tourist in Copenhagen.”

“ ... ”

We take the car and get off in the city and walk to our destination. On our walk we see the Copenhagen royal palace, Churchill park, and the fishing ports.

And then we finally arrive at our destination.

The place we get to is the symbol of Copenhagen, the representative tourist destination that alone, draws many tourists, just for this.

[The mermaid bronze statue.](#)

The statue of the mermaid sitting atop a boulder moves a lot of tourists... is what I think I’ve read on a blog somewhere.

“What is this?”

“What do you mean?”

There is a crowd of tourists taking pictures but in their center is just the one solitary statue of a bronze mermaid.

“All these people are here for this?”

“Yes, this is the symbol of Copenhagen. Not much to see.”

“ ... ”

“Alright, done? Let’s go now. I’m a busy man.”

‘I thought you said you don’t work and have so much free time?’

... but those words don’t come out my mouth.

I feel defeated and effortlessly follow behind chairman Park Jinseong.

But the park is beautiful, like a fairy tale.

The car quickly arrives and we head to the Copenhagen airport.

I buy a luxury knife set from the duty free shop and board the plane.

There were so many reporters in Korea, but here, there is no crowd to bother chairman Park Jinseong.

“Did the talk go well?”

“Yes.”

“Do you think you will be okay for your next exam?”

“I don’t know.”

“What is that? Speak definitively. What else can I do?”

“There is nothing more you can do at this point. It is all up to me now. Do not worry. I feel okay.”

Chapter 61 - The Fourth Exam (Part 1)

Choi Hyuk's fast combination continued.

I move both my hands like a flash of lightning.

Pa pa pat!

I blocked by stopping all of Choi Hyuk's fast punches.

Lastly, Choi Hyuk's right hook comes in which I dodged with weaving and retaliate with a short upper cut.

Tuk.

The upper cut slightly grazes Choi Hyuk's chin. If it had properly landed, I am positive it would have downed him.

Choi Hyuk shook his head back and forth.

"You are incredible. There is now nothing left for me to teach you."

"You are too kind."

Today is the last of the 20 days of rest I have been given.

Without hitting him, I overpower Choi Hyuk.

Using his well mastered technique, Choi Hyuk used fast speed to impressively do a combination, and he was able to either dodge or block everything.

Have my skills improved over this time? Yes.

But have my boxing skills surpassed Choi Hyuk's? That would be incorrect.

My technique is similar to a baby that has barely begun to walk, incapable of following Choi Hyuk.

But during this time, with the entry level 2 athleticism, lots of boxing moves have become embedded to my body and more than anything, the entry level 5 physical strength buff and newfound reflexes and reactions have really shown their light.

The reactiveness and reflexes are overwhelming.

With the athleticism, the accurate movements were memorized by my body and therefore I could react better.

With such advantages on my part, no matter how skilled and talented Choi Hyuk is, there is nothing he could do.

“There are still many things for you to learn but because I am

losing so single handedly, it is embarrassing for me to teach you.”

“Don’t be. This is all thanks to your good teaching, please continue.”

“Yes, it would be good to see you again here, tomorrow.”

“... I will come back.”

It has just passed lunch.

I decided to go home early.

While I drove home in the Porsche cayenne, I gave Min-jeong a call.

Perhaps it is a man’s selfish desires.

As I think about how this could be my last day, I wanted to see Min-jeong.

I wanted to spend time with her.

No, I wanted to hug her.

-Hello?

“Hi, Min-jeong.”

-Hi, oppa!

“I got to go home early today, you want to go out for dinner?”

-Oh no! I already have plans to meet a friend.

“Hyun-ji?”

-No, they’re friends from cooking school.

“Really?”

-They’re really skilled, they help me out a lot. I told them I’d buy them dinner as thank you.

“... well, that’s too bad then.”

-Aw, I’m so sorry. I’ll see you tomorrow. We’ll have a good day tomorrow.

I smile gloomily.

“Okay, let’s do that.”

-I'm sorry.

“That’s okay.”

I end the call and an emptiness creeps in.

How could I feel so alone?

It’s definitely not because Min-jeong can’t hang out today. It’s not like today is the weekend, and it’s a good thing that Min-jeong carries on a life of her own.

I can’t see her just whenever I want.

When I get home, like always, my family will be there. Other than having to take the exam, today is no different than any other normal day.

I am not the unemployed part time guy who would return home to the tiny one room basement anymore.

And yet, I feel this alone.

The three people who have died before me, their faces flit across my brain.

‘So that’s it.’

It’s because I have no people in life and death.

As examinees, feeling the anxiety and fear together, overcoming that together with comrades, I don’t have that anymore.

No one can share in my fear.

I have to fight alone.

A lonely fight...

And now, without anyone by my side, I have to go again to that place.

I arrived at home.

It is like it always is.

Mom and noona are out at work and will come home late, and even though Hyun-ji only has morning classes today, she still hasn’t come home yet and has probably wandered off doing something.

‘Should I prepare early?’

I still have ten hours left.

But I don't particularly have anything to do so I just decide to prepare for the exam.

I take out the battle suit I got from the Korean Arena research center, cargo pants and tracking shoes, and I pick out other clothes suited well for the wild.

I take out the 7.62 mm bullets box that I had hidden in the corner of my closet.

I retrieve my item bag and tuck in the bullet clip. I also put in a water bottle filled with fresh water and an all-purpose knife.

But then.

Ring-ring-

The smartphone vibrates.

It is Min-jeong.

'I wonder what this is?'

I am drenched in my solitude and received Min-jeong's call happily.

“Hello?”

-Oppa!

“Hi, Min-jeong.”

-I cancelled my plans.

“What?”

-I want to see you today.

“Why? We can see each other tomorrow...”

I asked in a slightly shaking voice. Min-jeong speaks.

-Oppa, your voice kind of sounded lonely, is there something wrong? I got worried, so I want to see you today.

Boom, a warm fuzzy feeling hits my chest.

This is the Min-jeong I decided to date without much thought.

If I don't survive past the 4th exam, today will be the end for me. But regardless of that fact, my heart feels light...

And at this moment right now, I am so immensely thankful to Min-jeong.

I felt a hot emotion just at the fact that she recognized my solitude, having to go soon to fight to the death.

“And tomorrow?”

-I'll see you tomorrow too, hehe.

I break into a smile.

“Okay. We'll see each other today and see each other tomorrow too. Where are you right now?”

-I'm at cooking school.

I had been there a couple days before.

“I'll head over.”

-Really?

“Yep, wait for me.”

I haphazardly shoved the items I had packed up back under the bed and left the house.

Due to how much I wanted to see her, my speed matched my haste.

I arrived in front of the cooking school and I sent her a text to come out.

“Oppa!”

Min-jeong raced towards me with an anticipatory and excited expression.

I get out of the driver’s seat and grabbed Min-jeong and hugged her tight.

“Woah, oppa! People will see.”

“Who sees.”

“The friends I mentioned earlier.”

“Huh?”

Only then do I see the friends that came running out following Min-jeong.

The two girls about the same age as Min-jeong look surprised at our public display of affection.

“Um, hello.”

“Hello.”

I awkwardly exchanged greetings with her friends.

“I am sorry I’m stealing Min-jeong today.”

“No, no.”

“You must have really missed her. Can’t help it, I suppose, haha.”

They giggled and teased us.

I am embarrassed but the resilient Min-jeong brazenly waved her hand.

“Okay, well I’ll be off first. My oppa looks to be in rather a hurry today.”

Her friends giggled and laughed some more.

I persisted through my reddening face and seated Min-jeong in the passenger car.

We take the car and naturally headed for Min-jeong's place.

Min-jeong looked at me with a sweet face.

"Are you in a rush?"

"Oh, sorry."

"Hmph, guys always get so lonely when they want to do it."

"I just want to be with you. Let's not do anything, just be here with me. That's all."

"Yup yup, you really think we won't do anything?"

"Eh?"

"A guy should know how to be more forward."

I'm at a loss for words and Min-jeong got out of the car.

"Come on, come up with me, I'll make you some food."

“Oh, uh, okay.”

How is it Min-jeong is already playing me like a puppet.

We get up to her unit and I eat the food she makes me.

A bowl of rice that's hot and sticky, [dwengjang jjigae](#) with tofu, kimchi, dried seaweed, and a fried egg make for the sides.

I can't tell if it's because she has learned well or if she was talented to begin with, but every single thing is delicious.

I finished the meal and we go to the bed.

Strip, hug, touch lips...

As if trying to fill a hole in my chest, I endlessly desire her.

And to me, she ably matches me, and she keeps stroking my hair.

It's a strange feeling.

I roughly indulged myself in her, but instead I feel snug from her protection.

I spill out all my ambitions, and we pass the time, holding each other, still.

The heat lingers, and with a blushed face, Min-jeong asks me.

“Oppa, is something wrong?”

“No.”

“Then why are you like this today? You’re different than usual.”

I reply kiddingly.

“It’s because guys get lonely when they want to do it.”

“You want to get hit with a \$860 present?”

An \$860 present, that would be the luxury Japanese knife set I got for her from Denmark.

I laughed and hold her tighter.

“Geez, I can’t breathe.”

She reprimands me while she snuggles in closer. We hug like we have been one from the beginning.

“This is a big problem.”

“What is?”

“I think it’s all going as you said it would.”

“...?”

“I think I’m going crazy for you.”

She must have felt good at my words because Min-jeong giggled.

“Didn’t I say so? This is how it goes.”

“I know. What to do.”

“Starting now you’ll have to do well by me. If you don’t, later when you can’t live without me, I’ll get my revenge.”

At Min-jeong’s cute threat, I can’t help but laugh out loud.

“I’ll do well by you. When the time comes, go easy on me.”

“Hmph, I’m going to pick you up and shake you and put you down and lift you up. And have you give me expensive presents as offerings.”

“Aw, don’t do that.”

“I’m going to bluff and say I’m going to the club and make you worry.”

“That’s too much. I’ll stalk you.”

We exchanged this joke and that joke and laugh together.

I can’t even tell the time is passing by.

Somehow it’s already 10.

There is only one hour left.

I should have gone back way earlier and prepared, but Min-jeong kept insisting I stay later and I wasn’t able to head back.

And honestly, I just wanted to stay with her too.

Every minute and every second is too precious and pitiful.

“I really have to head back now.”

“Let’s just be together until tomorrow. Please?”

It has become the situation where now Min-jeong is holding onto me.

I feel like I'm coming off as the bastard whose behavior has changed because my desires have been fulfilled and I feel bad.

“Min-jeong, I have something important today. I'm really sorry. I really want to stay too.”

“Hmph, you're going to be like this?”

“I'm sorry. Tomorrow after work, I'll come racing here straight away. Okay?”

“Whatever, wait and see what happens later. I'm going to have you beg me to play with you.”

Thankfully she isn't actually sulking, Min-jeong is joking.

I kissed her in what could be our last, and I put on my clothes and leave.

I returned home and finish my preparations and lay down in bed.

When the time arrived, my mind became fuzzy.

“Did you get a good rest?”

The baby angel flapped his wings and welcomed me.

“Indeed.”

“Starting today you will have to clear the exam alone, but your expression is brighter than I expected?”

“You have a problem with that?”

“Yes, I expected a somber expression as if you were carrying all the sins of the world.”

“Why, I ought to.”

I do a hook but the bastard deftly avoided it. He’s like a poop fly.

“How dare you call an angel a poop fly? You want to get hit with the lightning of holy contempt?”

“...”

Don’t read other people’s thoughts without permission. You just like to tease other people.

“The exam?”

“You can check it on your board.”

I retrieve my board.

-Name: Kim Hyun-ho

-Class: 7

-Karma: 0

-Mission: During your time limit, help the brown mountain elf.

-Time limit: 30 days

‘Elf?’

It is one of the species I saw in the files that Cha Ji-hye gave me. To help an elf, this really is ridiculous.

“Give me a hint.”

“Didn’t you already get the hint?”

“What?”

“Come on now, you should hurry and get going.”

The baby angel brings up the exam door.

I took a deep sigh and opened the door and went through. A bright white expanse of light blankets my eyes.

Chapter 62 - The Fourth Exam (Part 2)

I arrived at the place where I finished the 3rd exam.

The edge of the forest ends and a massive mountain blocked my view up ahead.

It's the place where I escaped the nightmare of a forest and wailed in both desperate joy and sadness.

The feelings from then came back and made my blood boil, and I carried the rage in my eyes and stared at the forest to the east.

The bastards are in there.

‘I will get my revenge no matter what.’

I promised to myself and turned to the other side and headed up the brown mountain.

I don't know where the elf lives, but I decided start by going into the brown mountain.

I sensed the direction of the center of the brown mountain by using my Guider skill.

‘Elves...’

From the files from the Korean arena research center, I have read about the elves.

I looked them up because as an intelligent species that aren't humans, I was interested.

Elves look almost identical to humans but have larger ears and whiter skin. They are not white like Caucasians but a white that is actually void of color.

Forest, mountain, river, sea, they absolutely love nature. Because of this, they hate humans who live by damaging nature.

They usually live in remote areas where human hands haven't reached and react most sensitively when humans or beasts invade in their areas.

They shoot arrows well and freely use spirit summons, and the spirit summons I have is a skill derived from the elves' summons.

Rarely, a human who loves and nurtures nature like the elves may befriend an elf and learn the spirit summons, but that number, throughout the whole of Arena, numbers few.

'When they said examinees with spirit summons was only me, I can believe it.'

This exam is about helping these elves.

And to do that, first I have to approach an elf and earn their confidence, but I worry that because they are exclusive and unfriendly with humans, if I'll be able to get close to them.

The reassuring thing is that I am a spirit summoner.

These elves love nature, so they will love spirits that are embodiments of mother nature.

‘If I lead with Sylph and Kasa, it might signal to them I’m not an enemy.’

I kept going up the brown mountain.

The slope is steep and every now and then I have to climb with my hands. Thanks to the physical strength buff, I am stronger and I have no problem climbing. Even if I fall, I can have Sylph catch me.

The Arachne glove is a big help. Grabbing between sharp rocks with my bare hands and it doesn't hurt a bit.

“Sylph.”

-Meow?

I climbed to the top of the rock face and summon Sylph.

“Check if there is a dangerous beast or monster nearby.”

-Meow!

Sylph flits off.

I let Sylph do her thing and kept on walking.

A moment later, Sylph returns and nods her head.

“Was there no excrement or footprints?”

Sylph nods her head the same way again.

In rough terrain without any humans, the fact that there's no beasts or monsters must mean...

‘Thank goodness. This must mean the elves are close by.’

Then first, I should be careful not to damage my surroundings.

While I chop wood for a fire I may get shot with an arrow by an elf.

I keep walking and pick up sticks that have fallen on the ground and put them in my pocket.

I am in cargo pants with lots of pockets and I gather a substantial amount of sticks.

About every 10 minutes and summon Sylph and Kasa. It is not to scout the area.

It's because I'm bored walking alone.

-Meow!

-Bark bark!

The two of them each grab a seat on either shoulders and intensely fight with each other over my head.

Sylph delicately jumps onto my head first and from there, using her front paws, keeps punching, and Kasa shoves his face at her and dislodges her from her spot.

Sylph uses her tail to pull on Kasa's legs and knock him down and confidently walks back onto my head.

Kasa jumps immediately and lands on top of Sylph.

The two kiddos bickering and fighting with each other makes me happy. As I walked, I discovered rabbit poop. I asked Sylph to hunt it down and within 5 minutes, she brings back a rabbit.

‘Should I rest here?’

I make a fire with the sticks I’ve gathered. I handled the rabbit and am about to grill it but because there isn’t a substantial piece of firewood, the first isn’t very big.

“Kasa, grill it for me.”

-Bark bark!

Kasa made an expression like he has to poop and then lights up a flame and cooked the rabbit in an instant.

Whoosh!

I asked Sylph to cut the rabbit into bite sized pieces. I’m eating it and it is very well cooked. A talent very befitting the spirit of fire.

To spare the summons time, I send back both spirits and continue my meal.

‘there is something I have brought for just this occasion.’

“Summon item bag.”

The item bag appears, hung on my shoulder, from inside I take out a small plastic bag. And inside the bag is a small amount of table salt, pepper, and seasoning/msg. I sprinkle a little of the seasoning as I eat it and the meat becomes even tastier.

Kasa really nailed it when cooking this and the rabbit is still incredibly juicy. This is indeed the best meal I’ve ever had while in the Arena.

But of course, it is not as good as Min-jeong’s cooking.

‘I already miss her.’

When we would go out on a date and then return to Min-jeong’s place, before heading to bed, she would always prepare food for me.

The so and so average that Min-jeong had prepared became more impressive as she increased her repertoire of recipes she could make.

Especially when she took some Pollack fish, eggs, carrots, mushrooms, and other vegetables and cooked them together, I was surprised.

I sigh.

‘I won’t be able to see her for 30 days now I guess.’

Is dating Min-jeong a mistake because when I was alone, I didn’t feel this kind of loneliness.

Now I have now teammates, and I have to get used to the solitude.

Fog begins to settle in the sky. I ponder as to whether I should keep going or stop here for the day.

But then.

“Do not move human.”

Far behind my back, I hear the voice of a man.

I’m surprise and automatically shout.

“Weapon!”

The Mosin-Nagant appears in my hands.

“I said do not move.”

I hear another warning from the man.

‘Should I summon Sylph and attack?’

I don’t particularly enjoy life threatening situations.

But I decide not to do that.

I put the Mosin-Nagant on the floor and raise both my hands.

“I have no intention of fighting.”

“I will decide that.”

Oh, will you?

I’m a little pissed off, but I hold it in. It is because I know who the enemy is. I have no doubt that it is an elf.

I can tell just by the fact alone that he called me human.

“Stay still where you are.”

I hear the voice that came directly from my back and I am surprised.

How did he get so close when I didn't hear any footsteps?

The elf has approached like a shadow and I think he is inspecting something because there is no movement. I am frustrated because I can't turn around and see.

"You didn't damage any trees."

Said the elf man in a reassured voice.

"I gathered sticks that had fallen on the ground."

"You're a human with basic manners. Based on your behavior, you wandered into this area knowing it was our area?"

"Yes."

"What is it you want? We do not want human visitors."

"I want to be your friend."

The elf man snickers.

"Whether a human is wicked or honest, you always approach us under the intent of friendship. The previous shameless trespassers said the same."

“What shameless bastards?”

“They tried to kidnap our family’s child.”

‘Human trafficking?’

That was in the files too.

It said that rarely, humans in the Arena kidnap elves and use them as slaves.

Because of their beauty, they are used as charms or for sex slavery.

Nearly all nations have legally banned it but didn’t it say that the Nerora royal family keep their expensive elves as proof of their power and flaunt them?

Because of that the human and elf relationship is turning scornful.

And it turns out that unfortunately not too long ago, bastards that prey on elves specifically have passed through here.

“Thank goodness it turns out they failed.”

“We minced them finely and turned them into plant food.”

It's even creepier because he said it like it was nothing. He said it not as a threat, but just to tell me that that is what they did.

“But that poor child has been deeply traumatized.”

“But it is still well that the child is safe.”

I keep speaking in friendly terms.

“The one that chased the five men and killed them is me. So, human, do not try to fool me.”

“I do not.”

“Tell me what it is you want.”

“I want to be a friend to the elves.”

“Engulfed in prejudice, you can only say that as a lie. Considering that, I will respond. Just go bac. We do not want any friends.”

“...”

“We have specifically told you. So go and disappear from afore my eyes.”

What now?

Thankfully I wasn't deemed an enemy, but his behavior is too exclusionist.

First, I do as I am told and get up from my seat.

Before I leave just like that, I think maybe, and summon sylph.

"Sylph."

-Meow?

Sylph sits delicately on top of my head.

"What?!"

I hear the surprised voice of the elf man.

"Human, is that a spirit?"

"Yes."

"You have learned to summon spirits?"

"As you can see."

“How can this be!”

“Is this that unusual?”

“More like a miracle!”

“...?”

Isn't it a bit far to call it a miracle? I heard it was just rare in the Arena world.

The elf man's words continue.

“A cat, wh-what a cute and lovable Sylph! This is impossible! Your existence alone is a miracle!”

“...What?”

“Here, give Sylph to me for a moment! Quick!”

“Uh, Sylph, you heard him.”

-Meow.

Sylph softly jumps from my head and approaches the elf man.

I too turn around. And I finally see the elf man's appearance.

He is a giant being, over 190 cm tall. (about 6'2")

With a slender figure.

A complexion void of any color, blindingly white.

Long ears.

A bow and case of arrows slung across his shoulder.

As expected, a handsome elf man...

-Meow~

"How could you be so cute! What a miracle!"

He holds Sylph and rubs cheeks with her and freaks out.

'Where did the dangerous spirit from a moment ago, go?

I learned something new that wasn't in the files. Elves like spirits. Even beyond that, they go stupid for them.

Does Sylph instinctively like elves? She's rubbing her cheeks on him and expressing affection.

I am curious to the man's reaction so I summon Kasa too.

"Kasa."

-Bark!

With a poof, a flaming puppy appears.

"Gasp!"

The elf man's eyes grow wide open.

"Human, what are you?"

"Hmm?"

"With Sylph and now Kasa, to be going around with such cute spirits! You have been blessed greatly by mother nature!"

"Oh, really?"

The elf man hugs Kasa too and flips out.

If Cha Ji-hye were to turn into an elf and a man, I think this would be her.

“Um...so, do I have to leave?”

“Go where?”

The elf man has a complete change in attitude which flusters me.

“You are a friend! You have the right! I will tell the mothers and introduce you!”

It was pointless to worry about the elves' bias towards humans. I get the feeling things will work out fine.

Chapter 63 - Elf (Part 1)

The village that the elves live in looked like the world of a fairy tale.

With strong cloth fabric draped over a large tree as their homes scattered everywhere, and all kinds of spirits flying about.

Sylph and Kasa, of course, look like the water spirit Undine and the ground spirit Noam in their various shapes and forms. There are also spirits that look like little girls and spirits that look like Tinkerbelle.

“Huh?”

“It’s a human!”

“It’s a human!”

“Mr. Jake must have brought him.”

The young elves that were playing about with the spirits halted what they were doing and stared at me.

Sparkling eyes, half full of curiosity and fear.

‘Cute!’

The young elves are so cute that it randomly gave me the thought of wanting to have cute kids like them.

To try and kidnap such children, those were some bastards.

‘Brute men. It’s a good thing they were turned to mulch.’

Perhaps it is because of this recent kidnapping event that the young elves looked a bit frightened.

Should I show them Sylph and Kasa? That should make a good impression.

I’m thinking this when the man called Jake signaled to me.

“What are you doing? Follow me!”

“Oh, yes.”

I followed after Jake.

I don’t know if it is because he is tall or all elves are like this, but his pace is fast and it’s hard to keep up.

The adult elves in the village started to take notice of me as well.

Unlike the young elves who were flustered, the adults' eyes are filled with coldness and alertness.

‘Everyone is beautiful.’

Men and women alike are all beautiful.

The women all looked like they could be models.

Hair let down to flow naturally, slender hips, smooth legs.

Their beauty is made more visible by their short pants and cropped tops that show a little of their breasts.

But I don't feel a sexual attraction to them.

I sense a strong awareness that they are not human so rather than sexual attraction, I simply find them to be beautiful.

I think that the bastards that intended to slave the elves probably intended to keep them as art more than as sex slaves.

Of course, with excessive lewdness that gives way to sexual appetite, there must be humans that do find a sexual appeal in elves.

“Jake!”

A female elf approached us. She walked softly and lightly like a deer.

“Ella.”

“Jake, what is this? How is it you bring a human here?”

Ella looked at me with tempered stare.

Jake spoke.

“This human is a friend.”

“Friend? Jake, are you crazy? Have you already forgotten the last time?”

“How could I.”

“How could you do such a careless thing? Do you know how frightened Ellis got when she heard there was a human in the village?!”

“I am also another person that cares for my younger sister. Do not forget that the one freed Ellis was me.”

In the Arena, elves also use the expression persons.

Then again, unlike our world, higher intelligence isn't only for humans here.

“And yet you bring a human here? What are you going to do for Ellis who is quivering in fear?”

Jake and Ella talked about the female elf and I got a gist of the situation.

Shameless human hunters kidnapped a young elf and she is their younger sister, Ellis.

When I appeared in the village, Ellis recalled her trauma from the kidnapping and was shaking in nervousness and her sister Ella is angry about it.

“It is also for Ellis.”

Said Jake.

“What does that mean?”

At Ella's coy question, Jake pointed to me.

“When she sees this human, her anxiety will be calmed. She will understand that not every human is an embodiment of fear.”

“Why are you trusting of this human?”

“You will soon see.”

The cuteness of Sylph and Kasa are my proof of friendship...

“Just what exactly is going on? Weren’t you the one that was most upset at the humans last time?”

“Of course. Ellis is also my younger sister.”

“Jake...”

On Ella’s face, she is moved.

And Jake approaches her and lightly kisses her on the cheek. Ella’s pale face glows red.

Ah, they are lovers.

No wonder, their conversation sounded like a bickering argument of couples.

Ella glared at me.

“I will watch you closely, human.”

“Of course.”

I replied calmly.

Ella’s glare elevated to another level of tension. Did my response sound like a threat?

I once again followed behind Jake.

We headed towards the center of the elf village.

The center of the village is void of houses and is an empty space. It is filled with all kinds of flowers. More than anything...

‘Oh my gosh!’

What shocked me is the size of one tree.

‘Is this a tree or a building?’

It is a tree so great that it is beyond imagination. Based on the leaves, it looks to be a broad leaf variety but the height looks like it reaches the skies.

It makes me wonder if the tower of babel from the bible was this

large.

But unlike the tower of babel's sense of guilt, from this tree I can sense a great life.

A warmth like a mother?

Looking at this noble tree, I am moved, and Jake spoke.

“Wait here. Without permission from the mothers, a human cannot approach the tree of life.”

“I understand.”

Jake walked towards the great tree called the tree of life.

I am left alone and I take in the tree and am in thought.

‘It's a matriarchal society.’

The elves' important decisions are decided by women.

The ‘mothers’ that Jake mentioned are the rulers of this village.

Rulers?

I think leaders is probably a more appropriate term.

The free flowing atmosphere of the elf village makes it hard to believe that anyone is ruled.

Human society specialty is chaos and that isn't here, it is carefree.

With that...

“That human is our friend?”

“Jake said so.”

“The human is iffy. What decision will the mothers make?”

“Hard to tell. But their decision is always right.”

The elves, men and women of all ages, gather around me.

There is no elf that comes near me to talk to me, but they gather around me like a monkey at the zoo and talk about me with each other.

“Should we go see what the mothers and Jake are saying?”

“No. The mother's might not like that.”

There is no order for the elves. The mothers are the leaders here and anyone can freely approach them is proof of that.

“Last time, when Ellis was kidnapped, and the mothers were discussing countermeasures, those kids gathered and cried and made a mess.”

“Jake was so furious, at least he went after them.”

“But rather than blame the kids, don’t you think the mothers’ discussions are rather long?”

Hmm, having no ranking order has this downside too.

Elves don’t have rulers and subjects so due to this, the decision making process is slowed.

How much time has passed, I wonder.

I think about an hour has passed, but still, no news from Jake.

‘What are they talking about?’

They could just take the human in to meet them, what could they possibly be talking so long for?

I grow tired and I sit where I stand.

“He sat.”

“The human sat down.”

“He must be bored.”

The elves chattered again.

This is how celebrities must feel when they go out. It must make it hard to date.

I am the center of attention for the elves and staying still alone feels weird.

At the end of some pondering, I decide to summon Sylph and Kasa.

The elves began to stir.

“He is a trustworthy human. He is a spirit summoner.”

Jake asserted his opinion strongly.

Mothers...

Underneath the tree of life, from the outside appearance, many middle aged looking women are gathered.

It seemed all the older women in this elf village are gathered here.

Amongst them, one speaks.

“Jake, I am not doubting what you say. There is no evil in a human who is a spirit summoner. But a human is not always bad because he is evil nor is he always good because he is pure.”

“There is nothing wrong in what you say there but...!”

“More than anything, it is unnatural. The reason the human came all the way here is to be friends?”

“It is definitely strange. Humans aren’t a species that move like that without an agenda. He has an ulterior motive.”

“Even if he is a good human, he may be being manipulated by a bad human. When I was younger and observing the human world, I’ve seen it before.”

The mothers’ conversation keeps evolving into a theoretical

discussion of the ethics of humans.

Jake, as the decision gets longer and longer, felt frustrated.

‘They are discussing other things again! This is the problem!’

The one issue the male elves have with them, is this.

No matter what the meeting is, there is a lot of chatter.

No matter the decision, the male elves move it to action right away, but the men have to wait until that decision is made.

Thank goodness the decisions they made after all that chatter was always right, otherwise, this matriarchal society would not have lasted very long.

And then.

“Mother!”

“Mothers!”

From far away, elves gathered in.

The mothers contemplate.

“Oh my, what are they doing coming here?”

“Oh goodness, well that’s the end of that meeting.”

“They must be curious.”

“They should wait a little longer, goodness!”

The elves, male and female, regardless of age, all gathered and shouted.

“That human is a friend of ours!”

“You have to accept him as a friend!”

“Yes!”

“Stop chatting and just meet him!”

“You cannot not accept him as a friend!”

“That spirit...!”

The mothers were at a loss for words.

Only Jake looked on at this situation as if I told you so.

The elves ran towards the tree of life as if to mob it, and hundreds of them make their way back towards me.

As that many people come at just me one person, I grew a little fearful.

“Gyahh!”

“I love this Sylph! Meow, meow!”

“Kasa is shaking his tail so fast, hehehe!”

Thankfully, I am reassured by the young elves that are playing with the spirits by my side.

A crowd of hundreds of elves gather around me, and Jake and middle aged women elf walk towards me.

They look aged, but incredibly beautiful.

They all look like ‘back in the day I was quite the beauty.’

They must be the mothers that Jake was referring to.

But their numbers are too many. 20 of them? 30?

‘I thought at most it would be a few women.’

It must be that no matter what, an older women elf becomes a ‘mother.’

No wonder the decisions are slow when there are so many decision makers.

“You are the human that Jake has told us about.”

Asked the women elf who looks to be the oldest.

She looked the oldest but she too is beautiful. Strangely, she doesn’t look aged.

“I am.”

I replied respectfully.

The mothers’ gaze turned to the children that were playing with the spirits.

The mothers see my Sylph and Kasa and sigh.

“How could they be so lovable...”

“But of course. We have no choice but to accept him as a friend.”

“Of course.”

I slowly began to worry about the elves’ future.

Chapter 64 - Elf (Part 2)

Thanks to my spirit summons main skill, I easily make friends with the elves.

Actually, I think perhaps that is the reason I was given this mission to begin with.

The goal of the exams is not to cause distress to the examinee. There is some kind of ultimate destination, and in order to reach that destination, every examinee has an appropriate role to that end.

Perhaps the ultimate power knew I would pass the 3rd exam of getting through the lycanthrope territories and would end up here?

“You have become our friend. But just because someone is a friend doesn’t always make them a close friend.”

Said the mothers.

“We do not yet know you.”

“We cannot just rest assured because you have adorable spirits.”

‘Rest assured?’

I never expected you guys would go head over heels over the mere cuteness of spirits!

It flustered me, but I remained calm and replied in a textbook manner.

“I agree that there are degrees to relationships. I am satisfied in that we have let go of our wariness and given ourselves the opportunity for a relationship. I hope to slowly earn your trust.”

At my words, the mothers have a satisfied look in their faces.

And so I became a friend to the elves and gained permission to stay in their village.

The young elves played with the spirits until my summons time was up after which they scattered.

“Follow me, I will show you to your arrangements.”

“Thank you.”

“I would prefer you drop the honorifics.”

“Would that be okay? Well, then, Jake, how old are you?”

“102.”

“... may I really drop the honorifics?”

“An elf’s life is thrice as long as that of humans.”

I see.

If I divide Jake’s age by three, he’s about 34, so I can say we are about the same age.

Even though of course, I am barely touching 30 years of age!

“Then, about how old are the mothers usually?”

“For our women elves, anyone over 200 years becomes a mother.”

“Woah...”

Those ajummas were all old women elves over 200 years old.

Even though they are old, they have all astounding beauty and none looked of old age, and elves must, unlike humans, age well.

The dwelling that Jake had prepared for me is a house no different than a tent.

But I have no idea what material it was weaved with, the tent fabric is as strong as a wall and the bed made of leaves and straw is soft and good.

The only thing is there is no lamp or candlelight and it is too dark.

I asked if he has any candles at which Jake shakes his head.

“Now that I think of it, yes, humans need such things. Elves can see well even in the dark.”

They live long and look young and can see in the dark. I really wish I were an elf.

“Rest well.”

Jake left me and disappeared.

I think about lighting a fire but I don't want to be a bother so I don't. I don't think elves like fire very much. Probably because fire burns trees.

But then, as the entrance to the tent gets pushed to the side, some woman's silhouette appears out of the darkness.

“Hey, human!”

It is the voice of the woman I saw earlier, Jake's lover, Ella.

But why does she sound mad?

“What is the matter?”

“Why didn't you play with our Elise!”

“I'm sorry?”

“When the other kids were playing with your spirits, my poor Elise was only staring at you!”

“Oh, did she? I'm sorry, I didn't know.”

How am I supposed to know who is where glancing at me?

But I am aware of Ella's temperamental personality and I simply apologize.

With a calmer voice, Ella speaks.

“Make sure you play with Elise tomorrow. She hasn't been able to come out the house since you came here! If Elise can't come outside tomorrow either, just know it'll be all your fault!”

“ ... ”

Ella says all she wants to say and then just leaves.

I wondered what he saw in her when Jake decided to be with Ella. Then again, Jake has some temper too. Perhaps their union is fate.

The next day, I lured the girl named Elise out and she played with the spirits.

It was easy.

Sylph went to the tent that Elise was at and just stuck her tail in and wagged it and lured her out.

Elise chased Sylph to outside the tent where she saw me and was frozen in fear, but I summoned Kasa to atop my head and she let go of her wariness.

After that, it was smooth.

We spent time playing with the other children and spirits.

The elf children knew how to summon spirits as well.

The spirits the children summoned were flying around in all directions and it threw me for such a loop I thought I was seeing things.

‘But what exactly am I supposed to be helping them with?’

The question suddenly crosses my mind.;

-Name: Kim Hyun-ho

-class: 7

-Karma: 0

-Mission: during your time limit, aid the Brown Mountain elves.

-time limit: 28 days 15 hours 42 minutes

I mean, I need to know what problem it was they encountered if I am to help them.

But there is no way I would have been given an impossible mission. I think finding out what it is I needed to help them with is all a part of the mission.

I decided to go ask the least formidable, Jake.

I use my guider skill to find out that Jake is to the east. I started walking in an east direction.

Jake isn't in the village.

He seems to have gone outside but I have no way of knowing how far out he's gone and I hesitate on whether I should keep going or not.

So I approach a female elf nearby and ask her.

“Do you know where Jake has gone?”

“He's probably gone out scouting, like always.”

“Really? Thank you.”

“But I did see this morning, Ella left the village with him, hehehe.”

“Uh, thank you.”

The sly laughter of the female elf made me stutter.

I headed out of the village in the same direction and keep going in the direction I sense Jake to be in.

“Divine protection of the wind.”

I use the wind guardian skill and begin to quickly race.

The skill is only usable for 15 minutes so I run as fast as I can.

Pat, pat, pat!

Every time I hit the earth, my body flies forward 5, 6 meters. It feels so freeing, my body that feels as light as a feather, and I excitedly keep running.

“Sylph!”

-Meow?

“Find Jake.”

-Meow!

Sylph flies off fast.

How long did I run like this?

-Meow!

Sylph returns and points forward.

‘Good!’

I felt as if I’m close and I raced ahead at top speed.

I meet Jake.

But Jake’s face looks annoyed more than anything, and next to him...

Ella is frantically straightening out her clothes.

I stare blankly and Ella’s face starts to glow red. Their skin is so pale that even the slightest change is evident.

“What is it?”

Asks Jake in an annoyed voice.

“... isn’t this neglect of duty?”

“What do you neglect of duty! What I do while I’m scouting is my choice!”

Ah, I see. Free willed elves. If this was my real world, it would have been an automatic dismissal.

“Anyway, what is it?”

“Um, well, you see...”

I think for a moment before I ask.

“Why are you out scouting?”

“You’re asking why? Isn’t it obvious when it comes to guarding one’s territory?”

“In the village, all the men were gone, are they all scouting like you?”

“Usually we don’t scout as diligently like now.”

Said Jake.

“As of late, we have heard that the area has been strange so we upped our scouting. Like the other day when Elise was almost kidnapped, human trespassers had become frequent, and the lycanthropes that live in the eastern forest who would linger on our outskirts before disappearing.”

“Lycanthropes?!”

I asked in surprise when Jake tilts his head.

“Yeah. Why are you so surprised?

That moment, many things cross my mind.

‘It is always this way. It does not end with one exam but there are many instances when the next is a continuation of before. They are like relationships.’

Odin said so,

‘Have you not already received your hint?’

Said the angel.

And the leader of the silver clan, Leon Silver!

The bastard knew very well about the spirit summons.

And on top of that, he established a human ranch and grew his clan’s numbers fivefold in a short amount of time. Why? To what end?

‘So that’s it.’

I realized it was according to what the gods had already decided.

From when I was given the opportunity to get the spirit summons as my main skill, no, from when I was resurrected as an examinee after death, to this moment right now, it might all just be according to His plan.

“What are you thinking?”

Asked Jake.

I shake out of my thoughts and spoke to Jake.

“If it is about lycanthropes, I have a story to tell you.”

“What? Yeah, you came from the direction of the eastern forest. Is there something you know?”

I nod my head and tell him the story of what happened between me and the silver clan.

I, of course, hide the fact I am an examinee, and I don't mention I lost my comrades.

“That happened?”

Jake's face changed to seriousness.

“Don’t we have to inform the mothers of this?”

Stopped in the midst of making love, Ella who was frustrated and annoyed, also grew serious.

“I didn’t think much of it because the lycanthropes were small in number, but this is unexpected. We must alert the mothers.”

‘Good!’

I made a fist.

I have told them of these truths and I can definitely ascertain that I was of aid to the elves.

And there is the promise I received from Odin before I began the 4th exam. He said he would send the army to subdue the silver clan.

‘This exam will follow through easily.’

I think I’ll clear the mission and stay the remaining 28 days in the elf village. There doesn’t seem to be anything else requiring my assistance.

Jake finished his scouting and came back to the village and told the mothers the news I told him.

That evening, I receive a call from the mothers.

“We heard your story from Jake. Please recount for us once more.”

“Yes.”

I once again retell the adequately dramatized story.

“The lycanthrope by the name of Leon Silver does indeed know well about spirit summons.”

“It is amateur, but he does know how to counteract spirits.”

“Having grown the clan’s numbers fivefold in the past twenty years could be him gathering the strength to attack us.”

“The 20 years is what gets me.”

Said one of the females amongst the mothers.

All the other mothers must have remembered something because they all pitch in another word.

“Recalling back, in that time, didn’t we fight the lycanthropes once?”

“Yes, an older lycanthrope used weapons and attacked our territory.”

“That was about 24 years ago.”

Gathering bits and pieces of their rambling story, I get the gist of the situation.

24 years ago, an older lycanthrope that had his silver clan leader position taken by a challenger, took his family and was eliminated from the silver clan territory.

The cast out family stepped foot into the brown mountain and got attacked by the elves and were annihilated.

“They said they lost that older lycanthrope. They chased him until the end but eventually lost him, I know, cause that was my husband.”

“I didn’t think much of it at the time...”

“Who would have known that a cast out lycanthrope would have returned to the clan.”

Basically, the old lycanthrope who lost his entire family and

without a place to go, had given up all hope and in despair, returned to the silver clan.

But that silver clan took back the returned lycanthrope, and Leon Silver had heard the stories of the elves from him and showed a keen interest in it.

And all is explained.

Chapter 65 - The Tree Of Life

“The silver clan itself is not the problem.”

The oldest of the mothers gestured with her hands and everyone quieted and she remarked.

“When over a 100 lycanthropes attack us, we have nothing to fear. Our husbands and young men will easily suppress them.”

The mothers nodded their heads in agreement.

“But the problem we have to think about is not that. We have to take a bigger picture.”

The eldest of the mothers keeps speaking.

“I am talking about the continuous bad omens that keep happening to us.”

At those words, the other mothers look surprised.

“Yes, that is true, Ellis’ kidnapping not too long ago and also, the humans have been trespassing more frequently.”

“Lycanthropes from the East, and humans from the north...”

“That is not all. From other directions, recently, other monsters have been frequently creeping in.”

“There is but only reason bad omens keep happening to us.”

“It is indeed the tree of life...”

Mumbled one mother as a tear glistened from her eye.

As she says so, the other mothers quickly halt her.

“Shh!”

“Be quiet!”

“Yes, this man is a friend, but are you really going to mention things regarding the tree of life in front of a human?”

The mother realized she misspoke and shook her head.

“I’m sorry. My mistake.”

What is this?

Something I’m not supposed to hear?

Thinking back, Jake did tell me that I was not to go near the tree of life.

Even after being deemed a friend, that did not change.

Everyone is on edge about this so I pretend I didn't hear it and move on.

Then the oldest mother asked me a question.

“Human, let me ask you one thing.”

“Yes, you may.”

“What is your reason for having come to us?”

That moment, my mind recalls my answer.

I had expected that I would receive a question like this.

Because the reason being that I just want to be friends is a thin reason, even from my perspective.

I speak.

“The place I used to live was a district governed by Viscount Bastian.”

I use the story I heard from Odin in Copenhagen.

“I was sick of being persecuted from Viscount Bastian’s tyranny and left. I would rather go to a place without humans and be one with nature and in that thought, I went to the forests.”

I sighed.

“In my ignorance, I thought that if I had spirits, I would be safe so I headed into what is called the forest of the dead where I was attacked by lycanthrope.”

“So you ran away and ended up here.”

Said the eldest mother.

I nodded my head.

“I barely escaped the forest but I didn’t want to return to the place I once lived. Then I recalled that you all lived on the brown mountain and thought perhaps I could be friends here and came.”

The mothers nodded their heads.

Them seemed to like the idea that I grew tired of humans and wanted to live as one with nature.

Well, it is a story made tailored to elf culture.

But the eldest mother looked at me and made a strange smile.

Her smile made me feel uneasy.

I felt like a kid that is nervous about getting a hidden report card found out.

“How strange.”

“... what do you mean?”

“As you have heard, from north, east, south, and west, all directions, bad omens have befallen us. Even from the center of our own village.”

The village center.

She is talking about the tree of life.

“And in this time, you have come to us claiming to be a friend. I am curious as to whether you are a bad omen for us or a good one.”

“...”

“Do not misunderstand because I say this. We do not suspect you.”

“I understand that I have yet to prove my loyalty to the mothers.”

“Do not worry about that. You have already proved it.”

The other mothers nodded and agreed.

I have proved my trust?

Is she talking about what I told them about the lycanthrope?

Was that enough to earn their trust and establish myself as a friend?

The eldest mother spoke.

“It is the spirits.”

“Huh?”

I stuttered for a second.

In the end, it's the spirits? As long as the spirits are cute?

“You think it strange that we took you as a friend just after seeing your spirits.”

“... Honestly, yes.”

At my words, the mothers laughed.

The eldest mother made an age defying charismatic laugh as she spoke

“But we are correct. We can tell the summoner based on the spirits.”

“Really?”

“Amongst humans, there are rare spirit summoners. Of course, not all summoners are good. I have heard of despicable humans who use spirits for bad things.”

“...”

“But the nature of the summoner is reflected in the spirit.”

“Excuse me?”

“The appearance of a spirit is a mirror that reflects the heart of

its summoner.”

To a surprised me, the eldest mother’s explanation continues.

“If you were an evil person, your spirits would reflect that nature and take an aggressive form. Will you show us your spirits once more?”

“Yes. Sylph, Kasa.”

I summon the two spirits.

The cat of wind and the puppy of fire appear and elate the mothers.

The eldest mother extends her hands. Sylph and Kasa approach her and behave adorably.

The eldest mother picked up Sylph and hugged her in her embrace and spoke.

“See this. See what cute and lovable spirits they are?”

“They are.”

I am well aware how cute they are.

The eldest mother continued to speak..

“You were lonely?”

“...?!”

I suddenly feel like I’ve been punched in the heart.

“You will have lived a lonely life up to now. I am sure you must have wanted comfort from someone.”

“That’s...”

My voice was shaking and I could not go on speaking. Many thoughts cross my mind. Things buried under a deep sleep, awoke.

The lonely days I spent for years while I studied for the civil exam.

One by one, getting jobs, getting married, the friends that disappeared from my side for one reason or another...

That was all met with a sudden death.

Exam.

Arena.

My destiny of having to fight to live.

I returned to the harbor of my family, but no one knows my agony.

I have to fight alone.

‘Is that why Sylph came to me?’

I look to Sylph. The eldest mother who was holding Sylph and adoring her, handed her to me.

“Here, she is yours.”

“Ah...”

“She is a dear friend that came to you to comfort you.”

Sylph jumped into my lap.

She came up onto my right shoulder and rubbed her face into my cheek.

-Bark, bark!

Kasa quickly jumped atop my left shoulder and wagged his tail and does his aegyo.

The mothers looked at the spirits and laughed.

‘So that was it.’

You guys came to me in your forms to comfort me.

... I had been lonely. From a long time before.

Embarrassingly, tears came to me.

The eldest mother looked at me with a benevolent smile.

I am thankful to her for having taught me the meaning of the spirits, this precious truth. I want to thank her somehow. Not because of the exam, but from my heart.

‘There is no coincidence.’

It was no accident that I got the spirit summons, nor that I got Sylph and Kasa.

Then, nothing so far has been an accident for me.

At the end of my thoughts, I spoke.

“Excuse me, but there is something I wish to ask you.”

“Go on.”

“What problem has arisen with the tree of life? Is the tree of life ill?”

If that is the case, all the skills I have are not by chance, but an arrangement of the gods.

The faces of the mothers that had looks at me and my spirits in happiness, all turn dark.

The eldest mother nodded her head.

“Yes, your guess is correct. For decades, the tree of life’s health has been deteriorating. We did not want to believe it, and as long as it didn’t wither on the outside, there was no definite way to tell, so we tried our best to deny it. But the time has come for us to accept it. The tree of life is growing weaker.”

The sadness is evident on the mothers’ faces.

A few of them are shedding tears. It is because the tree of life is a very important existence to them.

“I do not know anything about the tree of life. I know neither

what it means to all of you nor what will happen if it disappears.”

“The tree of life is the foundation that maintains nature. To us elves that love and live with nature, is it like a parent.”

“ ... ”

“Even if the tree of life disappears, us elves can still live. But we will have lost a great meaning. And in more realistic terms, the energy of the spirits will become weaker.”

She continues.

“The tree of life is the great basis of nature, and as a great life force, it gives strength to the nature surrounding it. It is the same for spirits. If the tree of life disappears, the spirits will get weaker.”

Listening to it all, the tree of life is to the elves that live in nature, their very identity.

I ask.

“When that tree of life withers at the end, is there no other way?”

I was worried it was a rude question, but she is undisturbed by it.

“That isn’t the case. We can find a new tree of life and nourish it.”

“So the seed to a tree of life exists somewhere?”

“It is somewhere. Because every tree has the possibility of becoming a tree of life.”

“Excuse me?”

The eldest mother points to the great tree of life a little way away.

“What tree does that look to you?”

“Um, I’m not sure. Other than it being the tree of life...”

“It is called a zelkova tree.”

I am shocked.

A zelkova tree grew this great and large as a building?

It is unbelievable.

There are tons of zelkova trees on Earth too!

The eldest mother smiles and speaks.

“Of course, not all zelkova trees grow that large and become a tree of life. Out of all the trees, those that can grow into a tree of life are very few.”

“Then we have to find a tree that has the potential to grow into a tree of life.”

“Finding it is not hard. They are few but we can find them. On this brown mountain, there are a couple that we have found.”

“Then can you not grow those into them?”

“We already are. The young men scout the east and north but our husbands care for those trees every day in the east and south.”

The eldest mother sighs.

“But because they have potential does not mean they will become a tree of life. We can put our heart and soul into nurturing them but in the end, most die before becoming a tree of life.”

According to the continuing story, 30 years ago, a pine tree that almost became the tree of life withered and died.

60 years ago, and even 200 years ago in her youth, the same thing

happened.

‘This is it!’

This is the real exam!

If I hadn’t found this and even if I cleared the exam, I would have only received a very small amount of karma.

I smile

At my smile, the eldest mother looked at me doubtfully.

Hearing a regrettable story and then smiling, of course it's weird.

“I am not sure if this will help. Would you look?”

Then, I make what chairman Park Jin-seong goes crazy for, the flame of life.

Chapter 66 - The Tree Of Life (Part 2)

In my hands, a small and round flame appeared.

“This is?”

Rare to see, there was a look of surprise on the eldest mother’s face.

And even amongst the elves, she who has lived the longest, this was a first for her as well.

Then again, this is a skill that only I have, so that made sense.

“It is called the flame of life. I think that I am the only one in the world that can create it.”

The eldest mother, with a face full of surprise, extended her hand to me.

“Hold on one moment, can you show that to me?”

“Of course.”

I handed the flame of life to her.

The eldest mother carefully received it and shivered as she stared

at it.

“It holds life force, from the energy of nature. It is as you call it, a flame of life! How, how did you create this?”

“Here, show me as well!”

“We want to see it too!”

The mothers swarmed in in angst, all eager to get a better glimpse at this flame of life.

Good to hear euphemisms exploded from here and there.

I looked on at the spectacle with a satisfied expression.

Then, the eldest mother asked me in a shaking voice.

“Would you be able to teach us how you made this?”

“I am sorry. I want to teach you, but I myself do not know how I am able to create these.”

“Do you have any clues as to how?”

“It feels kind of like a mix of the power of spirits and a healing potion. I actually don’t know. It’s an ability that just came to me

one day...”

I can’t really tell them it was through a skill synthesis now, can I.

The eldest mother was utterly disappointed.

“The power of the spirits and healing potions? I am not sure that is all it would take. This is indeed a happening that is a miracle.”

I believed it.

Because this special skill synthesis is the miracle that changed my life too.

“Would we be able to heal the Tree of Life with this?”

“But isn’t it too small?”

“There is no way this is enough.”

The mothers get into a heated discussion.

I cleared it up.

“I can only make one a day. If that would be of help, while I am here, I will make one every day and give it to you.”

“What do you mean one a day.”

“Ah, but this is too small!”

“It would have been good if you could make this a little bigger!”

“You guys. It is a great thing already that we have found a way to treat the Tree of Life.”

“That’s true!”

Everyone is busy chattering when the eldest mother clapped her hands and silenced them all.

She speaks.

“It is important how we use this flame of life that can only be made once a day. Shall we use it to heal the sick Tree of Life, or rather, to grow a tree that has the possibility of growing into a Tree of Life.”

“Ah, that’s a good point...!”

“It is definitely too small a portion to use for the Tree of Life. But it is plenty in growing a small tree into the Tree of Life!”

“We have to use it for the Tree of Life!”

“And when would we finish healing it with such tiny flames?”

“If we try to heal the Tree of Life with these tiny things it will take too long.”

“Then, turning a small tree into the Tree of Life, does that take any less?”

It’s a heated discussion scene.

The one that quieted them all is the eldest mother.

She asked me.

“How long can you stay here?”

“If possible, I will stay a while. At the moment, I don’t have any pressing plans.”

“We wish for you to stay here as long as possible. Actually, we wish you would live with us forever. You have passed being a friend, now you are the same as family.”

‘Wow, family?’

The order of our relationship has jumped a few steps.

But even so, I cannot stay forever with the elves.

Maybe I could if the exam was to live with the elves here.

I speak.

“How about this. We will use 28 days’ worth of flames of life to heal it. Depending on the results, if there is no effect, we will use it to a tree that has its potential.”

“That sounds good.”

The eldest mother nodded her head.

“I agree.”

“Yes, if it doesn’t work, on to the second-best option.”

“Why didn’t we think of this? First, let’s try it out.”

“This must be why our husbands complain about us!”

“Ho, ho, ho!”

These ladies are boisterous.

To think, this society is matriarchal and goes through decisions by way of such banter.

And then.

“There he is!”

A group of child elves are running towards me.

“Human hyung!”

“Human oppa!”

“Are you refilled again? Summon your spirits!”

“I’m going to play with the puppy and the kitty!”

The important meeting was about to be thrown into chaos.

“Oh, the children are here!”

“How could anyone resist!”

“Anyhow, thank goodness the decision has been made already.”

The mothers quieted down.

And so.

The force that influenced the mothers who lead this society is not even their husbands, but the children.

I am surrounded on all sides by elf children then the eldest mother quietly took the flame of life and left.

The elf society is indeed fresh and fun.

From that day forward, I created one flame of life every day.

In the beginning, the eldest mother came to retrieve it every morning, but after four days, this is what she said.

“You are now our family and you have a right to approach the Tree of Life now.”

This ajumma, she finds it annoying to come by every day.

From then on, I take the flame of life to the tree myself and blow it into it.

It is ever interesting to see the tiny flame seep and disappear into the large tree.

‘I don’t know that this will be enough.’

The Tree of Life is so great its top looks the sky itself.

Mesmerized by its beauty, I drew the tiny flame into my palm.

As if I am trying to reach that sky with palm, I repeat this all every day.

‘Well, I’m sure something will happen.’

I have faith and repeat again and again.

The core of religious precepts.

That is the backing of my faith.

First, after losing all my friends and being thrown into crisis, a great special skill called the skill synthesis was given to me.

Second, I gained the flame of life, and chairman Park Jin-seong, ailing from a terminal illness, came to find me.

Third, thanks to chairman Park Jin-seong, I gained the help of Odin, and with the help of the soldiers he sends, I will defeat the silver clan that is preying on the elves.

Fourth, because the elves have been anxious over the sick Tree of Life, I was able to approach because of my flame of life.

Look at how perfectly everything has lined up!

I am making way just as the higher powers want me to.

There is always a hint in every exam.

Even if I am not told what the hint is, if I think carefully, there is always a hint.

That's because that hint is always a commandment of the gods.

Now I finally feel like a real examinee. I feel like I might now what this exam is about.

‘Whether this helps the Tree of Life or not, I can tell by the exam evaluation.

When the mission time is over, I will clear the 4th exam. And according to the results, I will receive karma.

Depending on how much karma I receive, I can tell how well I have done in the exam.

If there was an effect, I will receive lots of karma, and if this was all for naught, I will surely receive less karma.

I spend the remaining exam time leisurely.

Without the threat to my life and spending the exam is peace. I wonder if this is okay.

I am not worried about the lycanthrope silver clan's threats.

First of all, Odin promised to defeat them with his army, and even without them, the male elves will put up a good fight.

In this village of a little over 100 of them, all male elves are experts with a bow and spirit summons.

Additionally, they move without making a sound in mountain and forest, able hunters.

Having been made a part of their family, I receive their protection and plan to spend my days pleasurablely.

Of course, I is not always relaxing.

“Let’s play!”

“Human hyung, where are you?”

Aww damn, the beings that the leaders are even afraid of have appeared.

I quickly hide myself.

“He’s hiding!”

“Let’s find him!”

“He doesn’t stand a chance!”

The young elves one by one summon their spirits. In an instant, tens of spirit animals close in on me.

Every which variation of sylph and other spirits pull me out of my hiding place.

“Hehehe, hyung!”

“Human oppa, just give up.”

“On the brown mountain, you cannot escape our gaze, human hyung.”

“Ha...”

My spirits are a given, but now they want to play with me too. I taught them rock-paper-scissors and [horse piling](#) and they went crazy for them.

“Teach us games today too!”

“The girls said they don’t like horse piling!”

“It hurts my back!”

Okay, okay.

After pondering carefully, I pick up five small and round pebbles. I place them in my palm and show them [jacks \(gong-gi\)](#).

What boy bastard plays gong-gi?

I have a noona and a younger sister so I got good at it, so what?!

“Woah, wow!”

“What is that!”

“That looks fun!”

“So cool. Human oppa is the best.”

The young elves go crazy and begin to play.

They have Kasa fetch them pebbles or use Sylph to shave the rocks smaller and rounder. Scary children...

The elf children become engrossed in playing gong-gi.

Soon, the grown-up girls that had just been glancing at the children also follow suit and play.

According to what I have heard, the young men that have gone out to scout are playing horse piling.

I have also heard the rumor that after the introduction of rock-paper-scissors, the mothers' meetings have progressed much faster. If that is the truth, the future of the elves really worries me.

‘I should never teach them gambling.’

No matter what I teach them, it worries me how consumed by it they get.

And so, my exam progresses, every day as enjoyable as the last.

And then, when my exam time is almost up, something amazing happens.

Pat!

“Huh?”

I didn't summon it but suddenly before my eyes, my board appears.

And on it are written some words.

-Spirit summons (main skill): summon a spirit and use the power of nature.

*Spirits for summons: Sylph, Kasa

*Entry level 2: summons time 2 hours 15 minutes

“Level 2?”

I'm completely surprised. My main skill spirit summons has gone up!

‘I didn’t even use a karma prize!’

Raising a main skill from entry level 1 to 2 should have cost me 500 karma.

But out of nowhere, it has gone up in the middle of my exam.

‘Maybe...’

I look at the Tree of Life.

This morning, like before, I have come to it to blow in the flame of life.

‘The Tree of Life is a being of nature, and with a great life force, it gives strength to the nature surrounding it. Spirits are the same. If the Tree of Life disappears, the spirits too will become weaker.’

To speak in opposite terms, if the Tree of Life exists, the power of the spirits is stronger.

The spirit summons is borrowing the power of nature, being close to the Tree of Life that gives energy to it has nourished me as well.

That is the only way I can explain it.

‘Such good fortune!’

I shiver.

Things are working out so well. I almost think it may be compensation for the atrocities from the 3rd exam.

Chapter 67 - The Results Of The Fourth Exam (Part 1)

Bboo-bboo-

“Congrats, returning home in glory!”

For the first time in a long while, the baby angel blew his horn and made a big fuss.

Every time he flew around, his bundegi that thrashed left and right uninhibited made me quite uncomfortable.

Regardless, like he said, this time, I was returning in glory. This fourth exam was, in many ways, very meaningful to me.

First, it being a long exam of 30 days, I finished it relatively safe.

Second, I got the idea of divine interventions and got a feeling for the general direction of the exam.

Third, thanks to the Tree of Life, my spirit summons level increased.

If I could say that I lost too much during the third exam, I could also say that in compensation for it, I gained many things. Not that anything could compare to the lives of three people...

“Wow! You are so impressive.”

The baby angel clapped his hands and complimented me.

“You are becoming the ultimate examinee that we have wanted.”

“...”

“Keep doing as you have been. Every exam has a specific goal and we want the examinee to hone in on that. We don’t just thrust examinees into peril for amusement.”

“I know.”

“Alright, okay. You want to know your 4th exam score?”

“Of course.”

“Then what are you doing not summoning your board? It’s not like this is your first or second time, are you an idiot?”

Boil, boil.

I had thought ‘what a change of pace that his behavior was amiable’ but sure enough, he finishes by pissing me off.

“Board retrieval.”

As I said it, the board appeared and the results were displayed.

-Name: Kim Hyun-ho

-Class: 10

-Karma: +2000

-Mission: Rest until the next exam

-Time limit: 30 days

“Woah...”

I trembled.

I was speechless at the quantity of my prize.

My class increased up by 3, and I received an outstanding grade with 2000 karma.

“These results are a reflection of value of my deeds?”

“Correct.”

“How are these results?”

“What do you think?”

“The best scores for a 4th turn examinee?”

“So you know. Good for you.”

The baby angel was being sarcastic but I paid no mind to his provocation.

Because my decisions yielded the ultimate success.

I just rested at the elf village and did nothing but make the flame of life every day.

It was so leisurely that at times, I felt nervous.

Am I wrong?

There is no way the exam could be this easy.

Could it be I'm doing this mission all wrong?

I fought with those thoughts.

But the results are in.

‘I was right!’

I could go crazy with happiness.

“Seeing examinee Kim Hyun-ho happy makes me oddly annoyed.
Go on. Get out.”

The baby angel, who was complimenting me in the beginning,
was provoking again.

The exam door appeared.

I raised a middle finger to the baby angel, then lightly stepped
through the exam door.

11 am.

On my smartphone were three text messages.

[Hyun-ji: stupid oppa ππ I tried to wake you and you didn't so I was late for class!]

[Chairman Park Jin-seong: Contact me as soon as you wake up]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^: how dare you be so cruel and leave. I will get my revenge!]

I smiled. I sent a reply to each of the three.

[Me: shut up]

That one was for Hyun-ji.

[Me: I will leave for work soon.]

That one goes to chairman Park Jin-seong.

[Me: I'll call you as soon as I'm off work. I really love you <3]

That's for Min-jeong.

Really, the whole month I was with the elves, I really missed her so much. Even more so with Jake and Ella's relationship.

I have to see Min-jeong this evening.

I get a text from hyun-ji.

[Hyun-ji: typo? That's a typo, right?]

[Me: I said shut up]

[Hyun-ji: don't call me a chicken]

TOIEC 400 pointer, the fried chicken business is your only viable future. Why are you leaving an open path and trying to take the difficult forest one?

Before I go to work at the cabin, I decided to organize my karma.

'Where will I use this?'

A whole 2000 karma.

When will I use it all?

There are too many places I could use it.

But I have to use it wisely, so that it would definitely be of use to me in the next exam.

It has to account for whatever may happen in the 5th exam and however much karma that will yield.

But then, what will the fifth exam be?

‘It must be to revive the Tree of Life!’

Following the context and flow of things, I was sure that will be the continuation in the next exam.

With jumping three classes and a karma prize of 2000, that is proof that my thinking was correct.

But I was sure the next mission will be to fully cure the Tree of Life.

Following the divine interventions, I was deducing that for the final goal of the exam, the Tree of Life must be cured.

‘But then...’

I don’t like to gamble.

But this time, I have to have conviction to succeed.

“Board retrieval.”

The board appeared. The karma I had received was proudly displayed.

“If I invest all my karma into the flame of life, how many levels can I jump?”

-The following is a display if you use all your karma for the flame of life (synthesis skill).

-Flame of life (synthesis skill): breathe the flame of life in and revive life. Two uses per day.

*Intermediate level 2: energy revival, anti-aging, effect on illness and curses.

-Remaining karma: +200

“Intermediate level 2...”

I deeply pondered this decision. If I use 1800 karma all into the flame of life, I’ll be an intermediate level 2.

I can make two flames of life per day and the effect will also be stronger. There was also the added option of treating illness and curses.

But if I do that, all I have left is just 200 karma.

If the fifth exam is to cure the Tree of Life, putting it all in and using 1800 karma to do that will be the right choice.

But what if that isn't the exam?

There is one variable to consider.

I lost a bit of strength in my idea and asked the board again.

“Show me what it will be if I raise the flame of life to intermediate level 1.”

-Flame of life (synthesis skill) raised to intermediate level 1, here is this option.

-Flame of life (synthesis skill): breathe the flame of life in and revive life. Two uses per day.

*Intermediate level 1: energy revival, anti-aging, effect on illnesses and curses.

-Remaining karma: +700

“So, the options the same?”

The remaining karma is 700.

It seems that going from intermediate level 1 to intermediate level 2 is what costs 500 karma.

Whether it is intermediate level 1 or 2, what was the same was being able to make two flames a day and treating illness and curses.

I’m sure there will be a difference in strength of the treatments, but I will have the leeway of 700 karma and I can use that to increase the level of another skill.

“Okay.”

At the end of thinking it through, I make my decision.

“Karma prize, I will raise my flame of life to intermediate level 1.”

Pat!

The light that emerged from the board seeped into my body.

I looked again at the board. I verify that the flame of life has

increased to intermediate level 1.

Now what I have left is 700 karma. Hmm, where to use this?

‘For now, there’s no need to increase my spirit summons.’

I now know that staying near the Tree of Life increases the spirit summons level. Why use karma to increase it when I can get that for free?

“Karma prize, I will increase my physical strength buff.”

-Physical strength buff (assist skill) has increased a level.

-Physical strength buff (assist skill): rapidly strengthens fitness.

*Intermediate level 1: gain the fitness level that surpasses human limits.

-Remaining karma: +300

Fitness that exceeds human limits! This is the level that Kang Chun-seong had shown me.

The next thing is easy.

“Raise the level for reflex skill.”

-Reflex skill (synthesis skill): improved ability to maneuver the body.

*Entry level 3

-Remaining karma: +100

I spent it frugally but I still only have 100 karma left.

With this, there is no skill I can increase the level on.

‘Should I get an assist skill?’

If I get an assist skill I can also use it as an ingredient for a synthesis skill.

I thought that was a good idea so I asked the board to show me the assist skills I can get with the remaining karma.

Amongst a variety of lots of skills, one catches my eye.

Teleport (assist skill): Leap through space in the direction you desire. Think of the direction and say ‘teleport.’

*Entry level 1: distance 1 meter. Cool down time 1 hour (-100)

Being only an entry level 1, the distance was a measly 1 meter.

But this is a very useful skill. In a dangerous second, if I use this, I can dodge an attack.

Not only that, but I can get through walls or doors.

Additionally, I’m looking forward to what skill I can create by combining this with skills I already have.

‘This will definitely be of use somehow.’

“I select teleport.”

-Teleport (assist skill) has been selected.

-Remaining karma: 0

“Now it’s getting fun. Skill synthesis!”

-Select the skill or item you wish to synthesize.

Skills available for synthesis: spirit summons (Sylph), spirit summons (Kasa), physical strength buff, guider, teleport

Items available for synthesis: Mosin-Nagant, item bag, Arachne gloves

*Items used for synthesis will be used.

“Synthesize spirit summons Sylph with teleport.”

-Synthesizing spirit summons (Sylph) with teleport (assist skill).

-Synthesis failed.

“Pfft, then synthesize Kasa with teleport.”

-Synthesizing spirit summons (Kasa) with teleport (assist skill).

-Synthesis failed.

“Then physical buffer with teleport?”

-Synthesizing physical buffer (assist skill) with teleport.

Pat!

-Synthesis successful. You have gained transmission (synthesis skill).

-Transmission (synthesis skill): you can pass an object flying toward you through your body without damage.

*Entry level 1: effect lasts for 3 seconds, cool time 1 hour

“Yes!”

I’m so happy I can jump.

The created transmission skill and also the teleport skill will be helpful in dodging dangerous attacks.

‘Good. Let’s keep synthesizing.’

I can test the skills later at the cabin.

“Synthesize guider and teleport.”

-Synthesizing guider (assist skill) with teleport (assist skill).

-Synthesis failed.

Another failure. I could only make one skill. It's a little disappointing.

But in my disappointment, I revert back to the items that I can use for synthesis.

The Mosin-Nagant, the item bag, and the Arachne glove.

‘Should I try the items?’

It doesn't matter if they fail, but this is more dangerous because I could end up with a useless skill and losing the item.

‘First, exclude the Mosin-Nagant. That's too important a weapon.’

I try to synthesize.

“Synthesize Arachne glove with teleport.”

-Synthesizing Arachne glove with teleport (assist skill).

-Synthesis failed.

Now the only thing left is the item bag.

“I feel like this will yield something.”

The item bag is the backpack that holds things so I can pass them through the exam door.

And the teleport passes me through space.

They both have to do with passing through space. If I combine the two, I’m sure something will turn up.

‘Let’s do it.’

If I fail, I wonder if I can beg Odin to give me an item bag.

First, I take out all the things from the item bag.

“Synthesize item bag and teleport.”

-Synthesizing item bag with teleport (assist skill).

Pat!

-Synthesis successful. You have gained spacial storage

-Item bag has been used.

-Spacial storage (assist skill): create a spacial storage space and store items. Say ‘store’ or ‘retrieve’ to use.

*Entry level 1: 50x50x50cm

‘Awesome!’

I felt an excitement as if I had won the lottery. I had just gotten a storage space that is much more comfortable to use than the item bag.

I put my hand over the items I had taken out of my item bag and said

“Store.”

Schook!

The bullets and water bottle and Swiss army knife disappear.

I recall the water bottle and say the following.

“Retrieve.”

Schook!

The water bottle appears in my left hand.

‘This is the best!’

I think I can steal with this method even. Of course, I won’t do that, but still.

And like that, I used up all my karma. I felt satisfied with how well I managed to use my karma so carefully.

Chapter 68 - The Results Of The Fourth Exam (Part 2)

“Bastard! Why are you so late? You want to be fired?”

“Thank you for everything thus far.”

“Ha, on whose authority?”

Chairman Park Jin-seong gave me a hug as I got out of the Porsche cayenne.

It was a sign of how desperately he yearned for my return.

I’m sure some of it was for the cure to his disease but treating me this way, doesn’t make me feel bad.

Am I to cure for free? I am getting a lot of money and aid.

“You’re here, give me one.”

“Hmm...”

“What, kid?”

“That is... hmm...”

“Oh what is it! You want more money?”

“Yes.”

“Kid, sure I am a billionaire but is this some highway robbery? Have I given you too little so far?”

“No, the thing is. I’ve raised my flame of life to intermediate level 1. It explained it definitely works to cure terminal illness.”

“Is that true?”

“If you don’t believe it, then fine.”

“You bastard!”

I slightly dodged chairman Park Jin-seong’s attempt to flick my forehead.

“Oh? Catch him!”

Chairman Park Jin-seong shouted to his guards.

‘Crap.’

I leapt from my position and landed to the side on top of an old pine tree.

Currently, my physique has surpassed human limits and doing something like this was nothing.

The guards stared at me blankly not knowing how to proceed and scratched their heads while as they laughed

From atop the tree I shouted out to chairman Park Jin-seong.

“How much are you going to give me? This time, you’ll see a marked difference.”

“We can fix the price after I eat it and get an examination and see how effective it is. I received an exam yesterday too so I can clearly mark the difference.”

‘Well, chairman Park Jin-seong isn’t one to be stingy with his money.’

I nodded my head.

“Okay.”

“Then come down, asshole.”

I jumped down from the old pine tree and handed over a flame.

Hwaruk!

The flame that appears from my palm. It's no longer a marble sized flame, but a fist sized flame.

“Oh my, it's big.”

The color returned to chairman Park Jin-seong's face.

“I've thought about it, but is there a need for you to eat it?”

“Then what?”

“Couldn't I just push it into your body?”

I spoke from experience from having blown the flame into the tree of life every day.

At my words, chairman Park Jin-seong hesitated for a moment then moved the flame to his lower chest.

‘Is it lung cancer?’

Seeing him put the flame of life into where his lungs are, I presumed that's the case.

The ball of flame seeped into chairman Park Jin-seong's body.

“Huh, this was all that needed to be done. I've been eating it all this time for no reason.”

“That's an elderly person's specialty. Putting everything good for you in your mouth.”

“Shut up.”

“How do you feel?”

“Haha, how do I say this? I feel really good, very good but I can't express it in words.”

Chairman Park Jin-seong inspected his own body and was amazed.

His eyes would probably flip if I told him I could make two of these a day.

“It's been a while, would you like to go for a hunt?”

“Sure.”

We packed out things and headed out to hunt. Particularly today,

chairman Park Jin-seong was full of energy and he walked ahead.

“This, I feel better than I did when I was healthy. How very interesting.”

But after about an hour, we decided to take a short break.

Chairman Park Jin-seong sat on a boulder and asked.

“How did the exam go?”

“I cleared it.”

“Woah, good job. So, there was a point to getting the aid from the Nordic exam group?”

“Yes, well, I suppose so.”

Even though honestly for the fourth exam I spent my days doing nothing related to fighting.

I hadn't verified if Odin was able to use his army to obliterate the Silver clan.

Now that I think of it, Odin won't know that my exam is over. Should I give him a call?

“How do you think the next exam will be?”

“I don’t think the next one will be very difficult either.”

“Really? That’s good.”

If it flows according to my thinking, in the following fifth exam, I will be much stronger.

Through the tree of life, the spirit summons grew stronger, and with the karma I received from clearing the exam, I’m going to increase my skill level.

The sun is about to go down and we haven’t found any prey.

“Shall I summon Sylph?”

“That’s alright.”

Chairman Park Jin-seong shook his head.

“It must be hard and at times, one must fail in order for hunting to be fun.”

That sounded like chairman Park Jin-seong’s life philosophy.

“Is that your businessman philosophy?”

“Huh? What crap is that? If you fail in business, that’s not fun.”

“ ... ”

“You have any idea how many execs and staff I have to feed, how could failing be fun? Are your exams fun? You’re a funny lad.”

It was useless that I said anything at all.

Chairman Park Jin-seong left urgently for the hospital to get re-examined.

I thought of testing out my skills and training, but today it was already too late so I decided to head home.

I miss Min-jeong so much. From my position, I haven’t seen her in 30 days.

I took out my smartphone and gave Min-jeong a call. At this time, she is probably at home.

-Hello?

Min-jeong ’s voice sounded happy. But along with her voice, I hear loud music.

With a fast tempo and strong beat, music that makes you want to dance...

“Mi-Min-jeong , where are you?”

I thought ‘no way’ and asked in a shaky voice.

-Where do you think I am?

“Um, perhaps, a club?”

As I said so, Min-jeong exploded in laughter.

The loud music suddenly disappeared.

-I’m at home.

Huh?

“Then what was that music?”

-I got the music to use when I got your call.

She teased me!

“Min-jeong , oppa has a weak heart. Don’t do that anymore,

please?”

-Hmph, says you, you just left after taking care of yourself.

I suddenly recall the events from a month ago.

“It’s not like that.”

-Hmph, I don’t know.

“Anyway, I’ll be there soon.”

-Do what you like.

And then Min-jeong just hung up the phone. Pretending to be sullen when she’s not even angry. She’s telling me to make her happy somehow.

‘I should buy a present.’

I haven’t seen her in a month and I want to get her a gift.

Ding dong-

-I don’t take the newspaper.

Said Min-jeong through the interphone.

“I know you can see my face through the interphone.”

-I said I don't take the newspaper.

“Is the interphone broken? Even so, you can hear my voice.”

-Wow, so persistent. I said, I don't take the paper.

“I brought a present.”

-Oppa~!

The door opened immediately and Min-jeong rushed out and hugged me.

I smiled and hugged her and lifted her up with one hand.

Min-jeong screamed.

With the other hand, I closed the door and went inside.

Min-jeong is excited in my embrace and when I laid her down on the bed, her expression became sour.

“What is this?”

“Huh? What is what?”

“Why the bed again? You want to be in trouble?”

“Ah, I didn’t realize.”

Gah, it’s been 30 days since I’ve seen you! Even though you saw my yesterday.

“Give me the present, the present.”

I took out a box full of macarons from my cross bag.

“Gyak, they look so tasty!”

Min-jeong gave me a peck on the cheek with her lips and ran into the kitchen saying she wants some coffee to go with them.

She delivered up two espressos and we have tea time with the macarons.

“You have better judgment than I thought.”

“Thank you.”

“It would have been funny if you brought a really expensive present haha.”

“Ha, haha...”

“Huh? Why that expression, oppa?”

“No, it’s nothing.”

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

“... take it out.”

“Ok...”

Obligingly I answer as I put my hand in the cross body bag.

‘My hands! Don’t fail me now!’

With my hands in the bag, I remove the wrapping so the brand logo on the box is evident. Then I show her the necklace inside.

“Oh my gosh, it’s beautiful!”

It was a beautiful black stone necklace. A woman from the shop picked it up for me but I bought it because I thought it was pretty too.

Min-jeong was closely looking at the necklace in admiration when she stared at me.

“How much was this?”

“Uh, 40 bucks.”

“This? No way!”

“They were selling it on the street so I bought it.”

“Really? Then it’s an imitation. Wow, it looks so much like the real thing.”

“Oh, really? I don’t really know that stuff.”

I don’t know but the internet search engines sure did.

And the GPS app sure knew where the store was located.

“Hehe, an unni I know has this. It looks just like the real thing. It

looks like a real Marni necklace.”

“Well, good, I’m glad you like it.”

I can never get caught that that is a luxury item worth over \$1000. A Marni store wouldn’t sell a knock-off.

“Put it on me, oppa.”

“Mm.”

I took the necklace with two hands and went behind Min-jeong. But that was a trick. As if she’d been waiting for it, Min-jeong headed straight for my cross-body bag.

“Ah, no!”

“Hah!”

Min-jeong takes out the box with the Marni logo and wrapper.

“Oh lookie here? In that time, you managed to put your hand in the bag and removed the wrapping and opened the box? What good hand skills you have.”

I raised my physical strength buff to entry level 3 and it improved my hand dexterity too.

“Spill it. How much was it?”

“... it was slightly over \$1000.”

“Crazy, that’s insane!”

Min-jeong slapped me hard on the shoulder.

“Are you trying to prove you’re soft? This is why Hyun-ji is so worried about you!”

“Uh, I just feel falsely accused right now...”

“About what!”

I haven’t seen you in 30 days and I was just happy so I bought you a present!

... from Min-jeong ’s point of view, we’ve seen each other every day and I randomly bought a really expensive present so I see why it looks bad.

“Return it.”

“I don’t want to.”

“Return it quick. We haven’t been dating that long, I can’t accept something so expensive.”

“I don’t know, I don’t know, I can’t return it. I won’t.”

I crushed and ripped apart the necklace box.

“Gyak! Now you can’t return this!”

“I won’t. Just have it. I just wanted to buy it for you.”

Min-jeong stared at me.

“This won’t do. Oppa, you need to be punished.”

“Punished?”

Min-jeong took out her smartphone.

“Uh, why are you taking out your phone?”

She put the necklace on her neck and suddenly made a “v” with her hand and took a selfie.

Then she sent a picture message but the person receiving it is...

“No, don’t!”

I despaired but it is already too late.

[I got this from oppa^^ Marni <3]

After that, somebody’s message arrives to my smartphone.

[Hyun-ji: Hey, you crazy pushover! You got lots of money???]

“Kuk.....!”

I despaired in an OTL position. At this, Min-jeong shook her finger.

“Hehe, oppa, anyway, thanks for the present. It’s really pretty.”

“That’s okay...”

“Oppa, are you sulking?”

“...”

“Come here, oppa.”

I flinched at her strong seduction but I resisted. I was sulking.

How could she actually tattle to Hyun-ji!

‘I am not a sucker, I’m rich. I have no need to be stingy with a piece of gum!’

How could it be difficult when I have \$19 million (USD) just sitting in my bank?

“You won’t come, even if I do this?”

Min-jeong started to take off her clothes one by one.

Delicately, every time a piece of clothing fell to the floor, I flinched.

Finally, when the necklace I gave her is all that remained on her body, I lost my endurance.

When the heat died down, Min-jeong stayed cuddled in my arms and whispered.

“You don’t have to give me things like this. Just stay by me. That’s really all I need.”

... that is the very thing I cannot promise you.

Thus, I kept Min-jeong, who I have reunited with in a very long

time, in my arms, and fell asleep.

At that time, I didn't realize that I should have kept my smartphone turned off.

Chapter 69 – The Turning Point

The smartphone vibrated and Min-jeong instinctively reached out her hand in her sleep.

Next to her was a deeply sleeping man who gave her a very expensive gift.

Still blurry, Min-jeong opened her eyes and stared at the screen and for a second, didn't believe what she was seeing.

[Chairman Park Jin-seong]: \$1 million every day, the amount is too big so keep it separate in a Swiss account]

The sleepiness instantly disappeared. Only then did she realize that this wasn't her own phone.

Min-jeong quickly turned off the phone screen and put it down. She covered herself up and pulled the blanket over her head.

Her heart was pounding relentlessly. Her chest was shaky and she couldn't calm down. Min-jeong dug herself into Hyun-ho's arms.

'I have to erase it from inside my head. That is Hyun-ho oppa's business.'

But she couldn't help what stays occupied in her mind.

A million dollars a day?

From chairman Park Jin-seong?

A Swiss account?

The men from Jin-seong group that he said he had a skirmish with, she recalled the events of that night. Then really, is it that Park Jin-seong chairman?

‘Just what kind of person is oppa?’

She looked at Hyun-ho’s face, peacefully sleeping, and felt anxious.

She dug deeper into his arms.

“Hmm....”

Hyun-ho hugged her in his sleep.

‘Oppa, you can’t.’

Min-jeong felt Hyun-ho’s warm embrace.

‘I want to take back what I said back then. Please be an everyday ordinary guy.’

The reason she became interested in Kim Hyun-ho was because she thought he was a man unlike other men.

But now that was what frightened her.

Because he might be a guy that she can’t handle. Because to be near him, she might not measure up.

Now, it wasn’t just interest anymore, she genuinely liked him.

Expensive presents, a rose-lit future, she didn’t need any of that. She just wanted to be with him always.

Min-jeong truly only wanted that.

I opened my eyes to the morning sun light, Min-jeong was already awake and looked unusually tired.

“Did you not sleep well?”

“I must not have. I woke up in the middle.”

“Yeah?”

I washed and put on clothes and check the phone, and I see a text message from chairman Park Jin-seong.

‘\$1 million every day? Then every week that’s \$7 million.’

That means that the effects were that good.

Anyhow, that’s \$7 million a week!

It is too much money for a single individual.

Like chairman Park Jin-seong said, it was probably a good idea to put it in a Swiss account. Since Swiss banks effectively protect client information, or so I’ve heard.

‘Was Switzerland close to Denmark?’

Might as well go to Denmark and meet up with Odin while I’m over there in Switzerland.

Speaking of, I should contact Odin too.

“Oppa, eat breakfast.”

“Oh, thanks.”

I sat down at the table and got ready to eat the meal Min-jeong made. Today was wonton soup with beef and eggs and tofu and other things.

“Wow, this looks tasty.”

“Eat lots.”

“This must have taken a lot of work to make. Aren’t you working too hard?”

“I tried it as practice, so.”

I just stared straight at Min-jeong.

Min-jeong was startled by my gaze.

“What is it?”

“Oh, just wondering why you seem down today.”

“Me? Not at all.”

“Really? Then okay.”

Min-jeong was unlike her usual cheerful and joking self and it was weird.

‘Did she?’

A thought occurred to me.

I thought possibly not, not that I suspect it, but it also explains why Min-jeong looked so tired.

Should I check it?

I raise my smartphone and pretended to check something. My eyes were pointed towards my screen but I was observing Min-jeong’s reaction.

Indeed.

Min-jeong kept glancing over at me. I had conveyed my concern over my smartphone.

‘Min-jeong...’

And I got all confused.

Regardless, I pretended not to notice and ate my meal. The wonton soup was delicious. She has good cooking skills.

Suddenly, Min-jeong carefully opened her mouth.

“Oppa.”

“Yeah?”

“I’m sorry, oppa.”

Min-jeong came right up next to me and spoke.

“What?”

She hung her head down low.

“Last night in my sleepiness, I accidentally saw your phone. I thought it was a text to my phone.”

“Whew.”

I actually let out a sigh of relief. I grabbed Min-jeong in a huge hug.

“Op, oppa?”

“Thanks for telling me.”

“Oppa...”

Then Min-jeong realized the situation and sniffled.

“I’m sorry I looked at your phone.”

“No, it’s okay, it was just a sleepy mistake.”

“I’m sorry. Hiing (crying noise). I couldn’t sleep after that.”

“Did you worry a lot about it?”

“Yes.”

“Min-jeong stuck to my body and whispered.

“Oppa, you don’t hate me do you?”

“Ayy, of course not.”

I stroked Min-jeong’s hair.

I gave her a simple explanation for the text from chairman Park Jin-seong.

“I have a business relationship with chairman Park Jin-seong. I made a small business with my friends but it happened to catch the interest of chairman Park Jin-seong...”

This time too of course, I spit out some bogus story.

It kind of overlapped with the business deal with friends story I gave Hyun-ji so I think it's a good idea.

“Then oppa, when your business succeeds you'll become a millionaire?”

“Yeah, I already am.”

“So that's why you brought that expensive gift yesterday?”

“Um, that's because I'm a pushover.”

“Hehehe, no. A capable man isn't a pushover.”

“It's already too late. I'm a pushover.”

“Aw, oppa.”

Min-jeong acted cute next to me throughout the whole meal.

Min-jeong had a morning class so I dropped her off at school and I headed straight for the mountain lodge.

Like always, I gave chairman Park Jin-seong a flame of life.

“Like I mentioned, I think I’ll go take a trip to Switzerland.”

“Go ahead.”

“I’ll be gone for 2 nights 3 days.”

“What 2 nights and 3 days for setting up a bank account? I can’t go with you this time.”

“I want to tour around and visit Denmark too.”

“Oh you bumpkin, that damned tourism...”

“It must’ve been nice for you having travelled all over the world. Anyway, you’ll have to miss your flame for a day or two.”

“Ay, when will you be going?”

“I’m not sure. First, I’ll give Odin a call.”

“Do what you want. I can skip a day or two.”

“Wow, really?”

“I got an exam yesterday and the cancer cells have definitely shrunk. The doctor says if they continue to shrink at this rate, I might be in complete remission in about 20 days.”

“That’s good to hear.”

“When I hit remission, I’ll give you another big sum so don’t worry about that part.”

“I don’t worry about that. You are the republic of Korea’s richest man, I’m sure you’ll compensate accordingly.”

“Haha, you turd. The ways for you to make money are endless.”

I looked at him with a ‘what does that mean’ face.

Chairman Park Jin-seong spoke.

“Chairman Han Man-Young from Future Cars is also in poor health these days. When you get to our age, we all end up breaking I suppose.”

“Ah!”

It's true, amongst the rich people there are handfuls that are aged and ill.

‘This will make me an incredibly rich person.’

Not tens of millions, but thousands, no, I could accumulate all the won in the world.

But on second thought, I wonder if there's a need for any of that.

“Please keep it a secret, my skill.”

“Why?”

“What do you do with all that money? I think it'll become annoying and burdensome.”

“Then again, that is true too. Oldies might come from here and there and bother you while you prepare for exams and they might distract you.”

“True.”

“Understood. I will keep it a secret.”

“Thank you.”

“Don’t mention it, I’m thankful you saved me.”

That day I passed the day practicing two skills, the teleport and transmission.

I teleported next to a tree and then used transmission to just pass through the tree.

At the beginning, I felt a little dizzy, but with the 1 hour cool down time and practicing it over and over, I got used to it.

In the instance of the transmission skill, I threw a rock up in the air and used the skill to test it. The rock passed through my body and fell to the floor.

‘I should be careful with this one.’

The transmission skill is 3 seconds.

Everything passes through my body in those 3 seconds. But after those 3 seconds, if something doesn’t complete its pass through?

Then I get the grotesque incident of having that something remains in me.

‘I really shouldn’t use this unless I have no other option.’

Like in a very dangerous situation or to use when I am sure that it is completely safe.

Or if the skill level increases and the effect time gets longer. Because if the effect time gets longer I would feel like it would be safe to use.

I was training like this when it happened.

As if he'd been waiting, I got a call.

“Mr. Kim Hyun-ho?”

“Yes, Mr. Odin.”

It's Odin from the Nordic exam group.

-I called you back as soon as my exam was over. Thank goodness you are well.

“Did you just finish?”

-Correct. I was in the Arena for 40 days. Did you clear your exam?

“Yes.”

-Whew! Thank goodness, indeed! I am sorry I could not help you.

“Huh? What do you mean?”

-Oh? Did you not know? The suppression was unsuccessful.

“A fail?”

-That is strange. Wasn't your 4th exam, this past one, to do with the lycanthropes?

“It wasn't completely unrelated. But I had no reason to fight with the lycanthropes. But a failure, was the silver clan strong enough to counter the army you sent?

-It was not the silver clan. Loyalty and skill, I sent 300 trustworthy knights and soldier. Those lycanthropes were no problem.

“Then what is it that happened?”

-Do you remember Bastian?

“Yes, uses violence to oppress the citizens....”

-We were defeated by those bastards. Hearing from a knight who

survived by the skin of his teeth, they had entered the death forest when Bastian's army surprise attacked them.

“...!”

I began to tie the silver clan with Bastian.

It began to explain a lot of the situations from the Arena.

-How about we meet and talk about this?

“Will do, when can I come see you?”

-It doesn't matter, any time works. Oh, right, I guess I'll need a separate time to practice.

“Practice time?”

-I wasn't able to keep my promise. I want to compensate you for that with something else, is there by any chance an item you need?

“Huh? No, theres no need to go that far...”

-There is the money I received from chairman Park Jin-seong and most importantly, I broke the promise so it's a matter of my honor. Because I couldn't keep my promise, you could have died.

Well, I'm sure that wouldn't have happened.

I didn't say it out loud but I spent a leisurely time in the elf village.

-Within 1000 karma, I will comply no matter what it is so just say the word.

“A, a thousand karma? That much?!”

-It is not a small amount, but to me it is not all that burdensome an amount either.

“How so? And still. No matter how small the amount, karma is of all importance. There is no need for this. If I need your help later, I can come to you again.”

-Just try and say something. I might already have it or I can acquire it in the Arena and I might not have to use the karma at all.

“Um, then...”

At the end of pondering, I carefully say.

“Can you acquire a rifle?”

-Rifle?

“Yes, I have a Mosin-Nagant but due to a lot of things, it has a lot of uncomfortable factors.”

-A Mosin-Nagant, it is a rather old rifle. I’m sure it is uncomfortable.

“Of course, it is difficult to get a gun without using karma to itemize it, isn’t it?”

After saying it all, I ask out of embarrassment.

But surprisingly, Odin replies with a laugh.

-No, if it is just that, there is a way to get it in the Arena. Without using any Karma.

Chapter 70 – Gunsmith (Part 1)

-Did you think amongst all the examinees, there wouldn't be a gun specialist?

“A gun specialist?”

-Indeed. There is an examinee whose main skill is making guns in the Nordic exam group.

“Ah!”

There is an examinee like this!

Of course there was.

Any modern man from this world must have thought of wanting to use a gun in a matter of life and death. Like I did.

-There is a time limit so the examinee doesn't just give a gun to anyone, but I am not anyone. Come to Copenhagen in four days. I will meet you there then.

“Understood.”

I finished the call and got a gist of a plan.

Tomorrow, I will go to Switzerland and set up an account and then going straight to Denmark would be good.

First, I sent a text to chairman Park Jin-seong and explained the plan and asked him for a translator.

But the reply I got was very unexpected.

-I have prepared everything for you. You just have to go.

“Really?”

-Yes, I’m sure you would do just fine buying a plane ticket and setting a hotel reservation and setting up a bank account. I know you. You little shit.

“Hehe...”

-Also, because I said a Swiss account, you think it’s just any bank in Switzerland?

“Is it not?”

-Read some newspapers while you live. Swiss banks aren’t like they used to be. They entered a tax convention with our country so you can’t hide your back money anymore.

“You know this well. Like someone who has done it a lot.”

-Shut up. Anyway, the bank I was thinking of is specific. It's a bank for all the examinees around the world.

“Huh? Something like that exists?”

-All the things associated with the exams and Arena cannot be revealed to the public. Because of that, there is no way to explain the assets an examinee acquires from selling majeong.

That makes sense.

Which is why I want to deposit my money into a Swiss account as well.

-For an examinee who makes a lesser amount, it can be set up disguised as paychecks, and for examinees that make grand amounts like you, that becomes a bit of a problem.

“So it's a bank for examinees like that?”

-Yes, the Swiss have made some benefits of their own with this kind of business. One who has tasted meat before eats it best.

In other words, no matter all the threats that America throws at them, this special bank has intense security that will never divulge private information.

-Anyway, I've made all the preparations and they'll contact you sometime today.

"Okay, thank you."

It's something I came to realize after meeting chairman Park Jin-seong but he really is timely and efficient with work. It was probably why he's so good in business.

Thanks to chairman Park Jin-seong, my travel plans become much simpler.

I make a call to let Min-jeong know about my plans.

-Oppa?

"Yeah, its me."

-Aren't you in the middle of work right now? Hehe, you couldn't wait to hear my voice, huh?

"Of course."

We exchange a conversation that if someone else were listening would raise goosebumps, and I tell her.

“Hey Min-jeong, starting tomorrow, I’ll be overseas for about 2 nights and 3 days.

-Switzerland?

She definitely didn’t forget. That text.

“Yep, Switzerland and Denmark.”

-Oppa...

“Yeah?”

-Oppa, I love you so~so~ much!

Min-jeong’s voice was suddenly filled with excessive aegyo.

I got what that meant right away.

“You want to come with?”

-Hehe, is it okay for me to go with?

“Yea, you can tour around while I’m taking care of business. But, do you have a passport?”

-Yes, last year, Hyun-ji and Ji-hyun and I took a trip to Tokyo.

“Okay, then start getting ready right now. We might be leaving tomorrow so. And leave the ticket to me.”

-Okay~!

Min-jeong’s voice is full of excitement.

Now when the person chairman park Jin-seong tasked calls me I have to tell him/her to reserve another plane ticket.

More than that, oh to spend 2 nights and 3 days in Europe with Min-jeong. Hur hur hur, this is going to turn out to be a very happy Europe trip.

Just thinking about it gave me a sweet feeling and I felt like I’m was flying in my Porsche cayenne.

But then what happened when I got home.

“Oppa!”

As soon as I walked in the door, Hyun-ji sticks to me like glue.

“What, fried chicken girl?”

Hyun-ji suddenly knelt down, face down and grabbed my bottom of my pants.

“Uh, what the hell are you doing?”

First after grabbing me tight so I can't run away did she show her true intent.

“I'm going to go too! I'm going to Europe too! Switzerland! Denmark!”

...Yoo Min-jeong!

Why does my girlfriend have such loose lips? Are her and Hyun-ji of one flesh?

“Hey, you [noonchi](#)-less thing! We're going on a trip as a couple, stay out of it!”

(TN: Having noonchi is kind of like saying you have situational awareness/you understand the situation. In this case, he's saying his sister doesn't have the awareness/understanding that she should let them go alone for certain reasons.)

“Huangg! (whining sound) I'm going too! Switzerland! Denmark!”

“You can't! You have to study!”

“Psh! You’re pouring money on that bitch Min-jeong! What kind of oppa doesn’t take care of his dongsaeng?!”

“Have you already forgotten the money I gave you just a while ago? You have dementia?”

“Huangg, me too! Take me too! I have a passport too!”

“Yeah, it must be nice having a passport. Now let go of me!”

“No, I won’t!”

Oh my god, I’m going to go crazy...

According to my memory, Hyun-ji is a hunting dog that never let’s go once she’s got a bite in you.

Especially if the hunted is me, she has never failed at the hunt.

Because of that, how much did I have to sacrifice to her since we were young!

“Then I will be blunt. Min-jeong and I are going to use one room, don’t bother us.”

“I won’t!”

“Okay.”

Eventually as I give in, Hyun-ji jumped up and down in glee and started the phone calls. Bragging about how she’s going to Europe.

“Whew.”

I let out a sigh and went into my room.

Then I got a call.

-Mr. Kim Hyun-ho?

“Yes, who is this?

It is a familiar woman’s voice.

-I am contacting you under orders of the chairman. I am Lee Soohyun. Do you remember me?

“...ek?”

-Haha, is there some sort of problem?

Her small laugh sounds joyful.

Why of all women!

“Uh, no there isn’t.”

-Thank goodness. I have, for now, booked the ticket but am calling in case you needed anything changed.

“Oh, I do have a change. Can you book two more tickets please?”

-Do you have a group?

“Yes, two people.”

-Understood. Please text me their English names and their date of birth. Thank you.

“Yes.”

I ask Hyun-ji and Min-jeong and get their English names and birthdays and send it to Lee Soo-hyun.

The next day, according to the time Lee Soo-hyun said, we arrived at the airport.

The whole ride there I was peeved and Min-jeong is effortfully

soothing me with her aegyo.

“Hyun-ji said let’s hang out and I said I can’t for three days and she kept hounding me why not and where I was going.”

“You could have said you are visitng family or something, there are lots of reasons.”

“Oppa, you would have been gone three days too, Hyun-ji is bound to have figured it out. What if she got peeved at me for lying to her, how would I have handled that aftermath?”

“True, true. How would you have handled me when you got back?”

Hyun-ji brazenly nodded her head up and down and said so.

I just grit down on my teeth.

I thought it would be an intimate time in Europe! Who would have known a TOEIC 400 pointer would get in the way like this!

“You should have stayed home and studied for your TOIEC...”

“Oppa, I’ll have you know, I caught up my grades. I’ll be at 700 points soon!”

“You’ve studied all that much and still not reaching 700...”

I ground my teeth sincerely at Hyun-ji’s unfortunate aptitude.

Hyun-ji is upset but thanks to it, I’ve finally won an argument.

“I’ll take care of the plane and room and board but everything else, let’s let each to their own.”

“Oppa, what about Min-jeong? Is Min-jeong self-pay too?”

Min-jeong clung to my arm and brought out the aegyo. The sweet touch I felt on my arm made me laugh like an idiot.

“Of course I’ll take care of you. Don’t worry about money, let’s have a great time.”

“Oppa, you’re so cool!”

“Hehehe.”

Trust in your rich pushover oppa.

But then Hyun-ji clung to me on the other side.

“Oppa! What about Hyun-ji?”

What, dis bitch.

“Oh my, who is this? The fried chicken business’ bright newcomer.”

“Awww, Hyun-ji too! Older brother, take care of Hyun-ji too.”

“What are you saying? Get off me. Its gross.”

“Iing!” (crying/whining sound)

After forcing Hyun-ji into submission we arrived at Incheon airport and Lee Soo-hyun was waiting for us. What will come to pass has come.

“Hello. I am Lee Soo-hyun.”

At her greeting, Min-jeong’s eyes suddenly spewed out hell fire.

From Min-jeong’s lycanthrope-like glare, I avoided my gaze.

“Oh my my, unni, you’re Lee Soo-hyun?”

All of a sudden, Hyun-ji pretended to know something.

“I am indeed. Is there something you have heard about me?”

“I heard you’re a great career-woman!”

At those words, Lee Soo-hyun gave me a meaningful smile.

‘How does Hyun-ji know something like that?’

I look at Min-jeong but this time, she’s the one avoiding my eyes.

...if you guys don’t exchange secrets with each other, do your tongues grow thorns?

During the whole boarding process, Hyun-ji asked Lee Soo-hyun all sorts of questions and at her answers, she was busy oohing and awing in admiration.

In that situation, at the Incheon airport store section she nagged me to buy her this and that.

I gave in and bought her makeup, Hyun-ji is so happy with it and Min-jeong looked at her with envious eyes.

Min-jeong, unlike Hyun-ji who is family, wasn’t in the position to nag me to buy things.

Eventually, I had to buy Min-jeong something too. Min-jeong

refused to the end. While she held a bottle of Chanel perfume in her hands.

Lee Soo-hyun looks at all of us with just a fun face.

The time to board came and people started standing in line at the gate but we didn't need to, we just showed the ticket and checked bags and got on.

First class boarding doesn't need to wait in line.

“Wow!”

Hyun-ji looked at the first-class space and was amazed.

Min-jeong was amazed too, but covered her mouth, and I am too but pretend not to be.

Others in the first-class section looked at us and laughed. Fuck, this is embarrassing.

But I soon forgot the embarrassment.

“Ah, I miss Min-jeong.”

“Oppa's not next to me, I'm lonely...”

Each seat is spaced individually in first class and her and I put on an Altair and Vega show (star crossed lovers).

“Ugh, those two.”

At our love display, Hyun-ji became very aggravated.

Having Lee Soo-hyun with us definitely made it more comfortable.

Lee Soo-hyun planned the schedule, translation, guide and took care of calculations, everything, she settled.

It seemed our flights were taken care of by Jin-seong group. The chairman is indeed generous.

The first day, we arrive at Geneva, Switzerland, as soon as we arrive, we checked into the hotel and began touring.

We walked the streets of Geneva and enjoyed being tourists, then dropped off the tired Hyun-ji and Min-jeong at the hotel, and Lee Soo-hyun and I just the two of us, moved on.

In order to set up an account at the examinees' private use bank.

When Lee Soo-hyun and I are about to leave with just the two of

us, it bothered me a bit that Min-jeong's face was aglow with jealousy.

We get into a taxi and moved towards somewhere, when suddenly Lee Soo-hyun said.

“Your date is very cute.”

“Oh, yeah.”

I flinched.

I mean, the one flirting was Lee Soo-hyun but I feel like I'm shrinking and that fact is sad. This is all because I'm lacking in power.

The place we arrive is in the suburb area on the 10th floor of some building.

There is no sign or company name for the building and that's weird.

As soon as we walked in, two security guards said hello, and exchanged some sort of conversation with Lee Soo-hyun and gestured us to the right.

“They said the account setup is that way. Follow me.”

I chased after Lee Soo-hyun behind her, and glanced back at the security guards. Those people, probably nationals?

As we went further into the hallway, something that looked kind of like a bank appeared.

But there only appeared to be employees, not a single patron.

Lee Soo-hyun took out and showed a bunch of papers to a counter employee and has a conversation. The counter lady employee looked at me and said something and gestured.

Lee Soo-hyun provided a translation.

“She is asking for your identification.”

I handed over my passport.

I put in a password, sign this and that paperwork...

After many processes, I get one single card.

Chapter 71 – Gunsmith (Part 2)

The design of the card I got from the bank is different than a usual bank.

Unlike an average card, it was heavier in weight and appeared to be made out of metal rather than plastic.

The outside was in a matte black finish.

The front of it had the letters ARENA engraved and on the back, the card's number itself was engraved too.

Other than that, there wasn't anything else for the design and it made it even cooler.

It made me think of cards given to VVIP.

‘This is really cool!’

When I check out and I take out this card, I think it will draw some respect.

I am in awe when Lee Soo-hyun explained to me.

“It is called a check card.”

‘Interesting.’

On our way back to the hotel, I touched the card the whole time. Having something like this, I felt like I am some kind of amazing person.

This must be why rich people go crazy over unique cards.

As night drew in, we took in the nightscape in Geneva and toured around. We walked together and laughed and talked, and it was a fun time.

Then the next day.

In Geneva, from the morning, we toured the places we missed and around noon, we got on a plane and headed to Denmark.

“Take care of them please.”

“Yes.”

At my request, Lee Soo-hyun nods her head.

“Have a good visit, oppa.”

“We’re going to go have some fun first~!”

Min-jeong and Hyun-ji waved their hands and disappeared with Lee Soo-hyun.

While I go to meet Odin, they’re going to tour around Copenhagen.

I went to the basement restaurant I went to last time.

I give my name to the worker at the counter who then verifies something then nodded his head and guided me.

We get to the front of a room and knock and I heard Odin’s voice.

“Come in.”

I opened the door and went in.

Inside the room were two people.

One of them was a blonde and young handsome man, Odin.

And the other was man in his mid-50’s with an awesome beard

“Is that the friend?”

Asked the middle-aged man with the awesome beard. Odin nodded his head.

“It is. Mr. Kim Hyun-ho, welcome.”

“Yes, it’s been a while.”

We shook hands. After, I shook hands with the middle-aged man as well.

“I am Neils Oslon.”

“I am Kim Hyun-ho.”

This ajusshi named Neils must be the gun maker.

Odin introduced Neils.

“Oslon is a 13th turn examinee, and the missions he’s cleared is small, but he has spent a considerable amount of time in Arena.”

“I think I’ve spent about 30 years in Arena.”

For a second I doubted my ears.

“30 years?”

“Yeah, I got old and died from a chronic disease and got made an examinee. Exam or whatnot, I should have just died, for some reason I said sure, I want to live and whatnot and now I’m in this boat.”

“Hold on, then, how old are you?”

At my question, Neils answered.

“You really are a rookie.”

“Yes...”

“My age is 57 years old. If I combine the years I’ve spent in Arena, I’m nearly 90 years old, but no matter how long a time you spend in Arena, you do not age.”

I learned this truth for the first time.

The time spent in Arena does not age your body. That means...

“That means it is possible to receive a test where you have to spend a long time.”

“Indeed. That’s why I’m a 13th turn but have spent 30 years

there. It really is tiresome.”

“Just what kind of test were you given?”

I asked.

Neils shivered his teeth as he spoke.

“I was told to become an apprentice at the town’s blacksmith. That was my first exam.”

“ ... ”

“A blacksmith is a really penniless slave life. I had to beg to be used and bossed around as a free slave to the blacksmith.”

There are exams like that.

I learned that too, that not all exams are a matter of life and death, from my own 4th exam.

“My exam that took the longest was the one where I had to make a rifle.”

Neils continued to mumble talk.

“As a muzzle loading gun, I got the general shape of it, then gave

it to a wizard and asked him to put a spell on it. Using a method of using magic to shoot out the bullet and thus creating a gun, was I able to clear the exam.”

“Huh? Is that the muzzle-loading magic rifle?”

“It is. I created the first one of those.”

I became blank.

Odin provided a simple paraphrase.

“All the items you get from karma prizes are things you can find in Arena.”

The muzzle-loading magic rifle that Neils invented was, for a short while, popular in the northwest provinces, but production costs and performance were incredibly poor and died out.

“Thanks to that magic rifle, I was able to safely pass my 2nd exam.”

“You cleared the mission using a piece of crap like that?”

Neils had a surprised look on his face. Even the creator of the gun admitted its poor performance.

Then again, if it wasn't for Sylph, I wouldn't have been able to use it.

“To have used an item like that and be able to make good use of it, you are that good at target shooting? You are worthy of getting a gun.”

“It's all thanks to the spirit summons.”

I explain to him simply about Sylph. Neils slapped his knees and shouted.

“That's it! With that, even a crap gun, you could shoot well with!”

“Yes, as long as it doesn't break while shooting.”

“I don't make guns so poorly they break while being shot.”

Neils said it like he liked me.

“Alright, for you, you deserve to get a gun I make. Well, I already have debts to pay to Mr. Odin here so I would have given it to you anyway.”

I looked at Neils with eyes of anticipation.

What kind of gun is he going to give me?

If he can, might as well it be an automatic, no, even if its small, a semiautomatic gun would be good.

With every shot I shoot, having to cock back the bolt, that bolt action is too much effort.

Because of that, with Leon Silver right in front of my nose I wasn't able to shoot him.

He saw my muzzle direction and my finger pulling the trigger and avoided it.

With a semiautomatic or automatic gun, I could have shot in succession and even at best he wouldn't have been able to dodge them all.

"Tell me about the gun you want. Of the ones I've made, I'll give you the one closest to it."

At his words, I replied right away.

"Automatic firing system would be preferable. If not, at best, a semiauto would be good."

"The ones you've used thus far were pieces of crap muzzle-loading magic guns and Mosin-Nagant's, those two, so I see why

you think that. A Mosin-Nagant... that's what maniacs use to goof around with because it is cheap."

Neils let out a sigh of regret and shook his head.

"I have yet to create a gun with an automatic firing system. Of the guns I've made, as for semiautomatics, I have one rifle and a couple revolvers."

"In that case, I will take the rifle."

"Think it over carefully."

"Excuse me?"

"Why do you want a semiautomatic gun? If you want to overcome a little discomfort of use, with the Mosin-Nagant you can show a good show of force and power. But the aim and the reload and the bolt action, Sylph does all of it?"

"..."

"If the situation is not in your favor because of the bolt action, that would only be when you are in a close combat situation."

At those words, I couldn't help but relive the day Hye-su died.

...that's true.

The bastard was in very close range to me.

“If it is for attacking an enemy when it is close, how about a revolver? If it's a revolver, I can give you two.”

“Two of them?”

“You're not taking the aim anyway, right? Sylph does it. Then if you grab a gun in each hand and wave them around aimlessly, they'll both hit accurately anyway, won't they?”

At Neils' idea, I couldn't hide my surprise.

After hearing that, yeah, that's true!

If it's a close combat fight, that method is a lot stronger.

If it's a far distance, I can have Sylph shoot with the Mosin-Nagant like she does now.

“You are incredible. To come up with an idea like that!”

“In an area without anybody, the short exams were 2 years and on the longer end it was 6 years; while clearing my exams, how do you think I survived the boredom?”

“ ... ”

“I spent my time playing and doing all sorts of things. Because I was bored.”

Living alone for years is the perfect recipe for losing your mind.

It's easy to image a middle-aged man playing, wielding a gun in each hand.

Neils summoned two revolvers and gave them to me.

“Take them.”

“Thank you.”

I took the two revolvers and checked my board to verify.

-Neils H2: The one and only gun maker in Arena, creator Oslon's semiautomatic revolver uses .357 magnum rounds.

*Load: 9 + 1

*Effective range: 200 m

*You cannot transfer to others or exchange for karma.

“It’s more impressive than I thought.”

“Because I practically copied the desert eagle.”

“Ah.”

No wonder, the design of the gun looked like I’d seen it a lot before.

“A magnum (bullet) has strong force but in exchange it also has a strong recoil so it is difficult to use. But of course, that doesn’t apply to examinees?”

“Yes, that won’t be a problem.”

My physical strength buff is intermediate level 1, making my wrists the same as steel.

Having two revolvers I can use in close range made my heart skip a beat in joy.

In addition to these weapons, the physical strength buff and the reflex ability, the divine protection of the flame and divine protection of the wind, even the leader of the silver clan, Leon Silver, wouldn’t be a problem.

I wondered if it was possible to get a shooting related skill somehow.

‘Maybe if I combine the guider skill with the gun, I can make a skill like that?’

Sounds possible.

When I combined the physical strength buff and guider, I got the reflex ability. It gave me a skill to know the path to move my body in.

So then if I combine the gun and the guider, it seems only reasonable that a shooting skill would be created.

I think maybe so I ask Neils.

“Do you, by any chance, have a gun you are planning on throwing away?”

“Why do you ask?”

“I have a situation.”

“The guns I make cannot be given to others or exchanged for karma, you know that?”

“Yes, I saw the explanation.”

A gun that is made by Neils Oslon can only have an owner that its creator, Neils Oslon, chooses.

“You know the muzzle-loading magic rifle? Because of the exam, I have about 10 of those.”

“That would work. It is shameful I realize, but would it be possible if I could have one of them?”

“It doesn’t matter. They’re no use anyway. If you gave it to me I wouldn’t take it.”

Neils summoned a muzzle-loading magic rifle and gave it to me.

‘Nice!’

With all this, coming to Denmark was definitely worth it and then some.

The deal was finished and we shared a meal and drink and shared some stories.

When the drink went in him, Neils spilled all of the life he lived in Arena and he was indeed a person that went through a lot of adversity.

The most ridiculous one was the 7th turn.

‘To go out to the remote land where no one ever goes and take root there, that’s a bit harsh.’

Here, I was able to hear a very important piece of information.

“Did you know why the angel bastards sent me to a no-man’s land for an exam?”

“I’m not sure. Was it not to avoid having your gun making skills influence the society of the Arena residents?”

“There is that. But there was a more important reason.”

Neils drank his beer in a single shot, emptying it and spoke.

“It was to eliminate the errors in the flow of time.”

This was his explanation.

He started his exam at the same time as Odin, but while Odin spent 40 days for his exam, Neils spent 3 years.

In order to eliminate the problem of the time gaps, the angels sent Neils to a place without anybody else around.

That view makes sense. I've thought of a similar idea before as well.

If you look at it that way, the reason examinees first start in a place like the outskirts without anyone else around might be because of this conflict of time flow.

Chapter 72 – Unlimited (Part 1)

When I got back to the hotel I attempted to use the skill synthesis.

“Muzzle loading magic rifle synthesize with guider.”

-Synthesizing muzzle loading magic rifle with guider (assist skill).

Pat!

-Synthesis successful. You have acquired shooting (synthesis skill).

-The muzzle loading magic rifle will be used.

-Shooting (synthesis skill): In the instance of using firearms, 100% accuracy to target within a determined range.

*Entry level 1: applicable distance range 10 meters

“Nice!”

I rejoiced. It was exactly the skill I wanted.

When I use a firearm for an object within 10 meters, even without Sylph's help, I can now hit it with 100% accuracy.

Sylph can shoot from a long distance and I can from a closer distance, it's a double shooting pattern.

Min-jeong had excitedly toured Copenhagen with Hyun-ji, kept a cheerful happy mood and was very passionately cuddling with me.

Thanks to it we spent a sweet night and the next day, with a regretful heart, we loaded ourselves onto a flight to Korea.

“We are on our way.”

Incheon Airport.

Lee Soo-hyun had even prepared a private taxi for us timed to our arrival to the airport.

I felt thankful towards her for taking care of our itinerary down to the last detail and all the way to the end.

“I am very thankful. We owe you a lot.”

“Then you can treat me to a meal sometime.”

“... Huh?”

“Oh, good! I’d love to come too!”

Min-jeong quickly stuck to my side and blocked the gaze.

I can’t tell if Lee soo-hyun is joking or for real or not, but she smiled and then departed.

[Chairman Park Jinseong’s lightning recovery!]

[Deteriorating health of Chairman Park Jinseong ‘I have no health issues’]

[Jinseong Electronics’ downhill performance brings a return of Chairman Park Jinseong, failed attempt at successor?]

[Chairman Park Jinseong, displays excellent health]

[Jinseong Group affiliates/company/subsidiary value/worth rapid rebound in stocks ‘the return of the king effect’]

[The comeback of Chairman Park Jinseong ‘we need to be aware that everyone is always on the verge of death’ business management proclamation]

News and papers were all abuzz.

Chairman Park Jinseong, more than just being healthy, reappeared with a rejuvenated appearance.

Biggest net worth in the Republic of Korea.

Influence at level 0, this great man.

In order to reorganize the financial world, the king makes a shocking return.

Competitors' stocks nearly crash completely with the return of Jinseong Electronics leader.

‘Incredible.’

Watching the loud news, I couldn't contain my amazement.

The healed chairman Park Jinseong, as he ate his last flame of life, had said something when he was eating it.

“Jinseong groups declining condition was actually not the fault of my children. The climate was headed in that direction. With smartphones and tablets, all of was too saturated.”

“Was it?”

“But as I return to the scene, interestingly as I was getting the spotlight, the anticipation will increase the stock prices.”

Chairman Park Jinseong smiled giddily and talked confidently.

“The increase of stock is temporary, but the atmosphere will change. Originally when you overcome an obstacle, that’s how you start it.”

“Anyway, congratulations. I guess we won’t be seeing each other anymore.”

“What are you talking about? You are an examinee that is managed by the Jinseong Group. If you forget that, it complicates things.”

“But that is just the official title. Your goal has already been met.”

“My relationship with you will continue. Who is to know that I won’t get sick again?”

“If you’ve lived this long, that should be good enough. Well, are you planning on becoming [Jangsu the king](#)? Did you know that Jangsu’s son, the crown prince Joda, was the origin of the word ‘peck’?

“You bastard!”

We went back and forth like that when chairman Park Jinseong said this as we say goodbye.

“If there is anything you need, contact me. As a reward for giving me new life, in a little while, there will be a supplement, you can anticipate it.”

“I have enough money already though, so.”

There is 30 million dollars in my swiss account.

I have become a rich man so suddenly that I hadn't really gotten used to this new reality.

It could also be because I didn't know how to use money.

Anyway, after his return, he was showing a storm-like happiness, seeing that made me happy.

Drastically organizing a useless product lineup, aggressively scouting IT and designers and starting promotions, chairman Park Jinseong looked like he was thoroughly enjoying himself.

He had a serious expression on his face but having hunted and hung out with him for a while now, I think I understand how he

must have felt.

The joy of being alive.

The great gratitude he felt for being given another chance at life.

With this new life that Chairman Park Jinseong had been given, he wasn't wasting a minute nor a second; he was living hard.

Since the top executive was being like that, the workers below him also followed suit and became busy and the whole of Jinseong group became energized.

According to chairman Park Jinseong's plan, the atmosphere had changed amazingly.

Anyway, due to chairman Park Jinseong's full recovery, separate from that, my remaining rest period is creeping to an end.

“Oppa, aren't we meeting too much?”

It was the night of the day before the exam.

We had spent the night together at her place when Min-jeong suddenly asked the question.

“You think so?”

We did meet nearly every day.

When the 5th turn exam begins, it is because I didn't know how long I wouldn't be able to see Min-jeong so I wanted to hang out with her a lot in advance.

From Min-jeong's perspective, it could have been a little bit too much.

“Are you annoyed I come over every day?”

“Of course not, oppa. That's not what I meant.”

Min-jeong cuddled herself into me.

“I'm just afraid that we are aflame and it will burn out fast. What if you don't go that far and get bored of me?”

“That won't happen. I can promise you that.”

“Tsk, like that can be something that can be promised.”

I can definitely promise it.

Soon, tomorrow, I have to spend a long time in the Arena.

And after that, if I do return, I had no doubt that after a long departure, I will be aflame for Min-jeong.

“It’s actually, I heard that you haven’t dated anyone for long periods, that’s what I heard from Min-jeong.”

“Damn, she just spills everything!”

“You do the same too. Let’s not tell Hyun-ji things she doesn’t need to know now, okay?”

Min-jeong chuckled.

“This time, it’s different. I want to be with you for a long, long time.”

“Me too.”

Honestly, I’m not sure.

This relationship...I started it just thinking of it as casual dating.

That even if I were to die, she would be a little sad and then forget it, I wanted it to be a relationship with little affection, like that.

But Min-jeong, unlike her first impression, isn’t the kind of

casual girl I thought she was. I opened the lid, unlike the carefree Hyun-ji, she turned out to be the opposite and sincere.

It worried me.

‘No doubt she’ll be sad if I died?’

I looked to Min-jeong and secretly sighed.

There was no other way, I had to survive. No matter what, desperately, persistently, I have to come back.

The next day in the morning, I took Min-jeong to school and I went to work at the mountain lodge.

Nowadays, unlike before, chairman Park Jinseong doesn’t come here every day, but instead he had an employee deliver the things I asked for.

I wondered if he is treating me carelessly now that his business is taken care of.

“Here you go.”

“Thank you.”

I took the box that chairman Park Jinseong’s 3rd secretariats

gave me and load it into my car trunk.

It's a box full of magnum .357 bullets.

I had needed .357 bullets to load into my newly acquired 2 semi-automatic Neils' H2 guns.

I headed straight home and placed the boxes inside the house.

'Now that I think of it, I'll be 30 soon.'

In no time, it had turned to December.

When I come back from my 5th turn exam, Min-jeong and Hyun-ji, they'll be done with their college studies.

Min-jeong, when she graduates, is going to go to work at a relative oppa's company and will have to move to Seoul.

I get the feeling she is already looking for a one room apartment online.

'Should I be independent too?'

I don't think it would be a bad idea to follow Min-jeong to Seoul with her.

I want to move in with her but, having only been dating for a month, I think that's moving too fast. It was just my own wish.

‘When I get back, I’ll get my own place.’

I have lots of money, shouldn't I just spend some of it?

Thinking though this and that, the time arrived.

“Let’s go.”

I laid in bed and closed my eyes.

I took deep breaths and braced myself. And then in an instant, I lost consciousness.

“Wake up. How late are you going to lay around and sleep?”

In my ear, I hear a familiar and revolting voice and at that I open my eyes.

I come to and I am laying down.

Flap, flap, the baby angel is flying around and the first thing I see is the baby angel's face and it put me in a bad mood.

“What’s this exam?”

I asked.

The baby angel chuckled and laughed.

“This is a very easy exam.”

That bastard, as the words easily came out of his mouth, I got an uneasy feeling.

If it was easy, why are you chuckling?

“Board summons.”

-Name: Kim Hyun-ho

-Class: 10

_Karma: 0

-Mission: Revive the tree of life

-Time limit: unlimited

‘As expected.’

Indeed, the mission is to revive the tree of life.

My decision to invest my karma in the flame of life was good.

But there is a word that is unsettling to me.

“Unlimited?”

“Wow, that’s nice. There is no time limit and without any danger, you can just leisurely spend your days with the elves.”

“Wait, why is it unlimited?”

“Does that upset you?”

“Well, no, it is not that it is upsetting, per se...”

“What are you going to do if you have a time limit? Would that change anything?”

“...no.”

Regardless, there is only one way to revive the tree.

Every day, feed it two flames of life.

There was nothing I can do by trying to rush.

That's why there was no time limit. There was no point.

... hold on.

'There's not point? No way.'

There's no such thing as not having a point.

This too, has a point/meaning. In an exam, everything is a hint.

A hidden message.

The meaning of this exam.

There is definitely something the gods want from me.

"Is it possible that this will take longer than a year?"

"There are people who spend 6 years in an exam. What crime is a year?"

“ ... ”

I recall Neils and shuddered.

“It is not like spending time in that world ages you so it doesn't matter. Oh, but you'll be lonely every night, is that it? Hehehe.”

I wanted to shoot that bastard with my gun.

“Now now, don't harbor animosity towards me, be on your way.”

The exam door appeared before me.

I sighed and opened the door and enter.

A bright light swallowed me.

“Hyung, wake up! How long are you going to sleep?”

“The sun is already midday, you think we'll leave you to sleep?”

“We won't allow this, humph.”

Playfulness incarnate, these heartless child elves have invaded my tent and surrounded me.

I got dragged by the children to the outside and I saw a scene, children and women playing.

The girl elves are playing the gong-gi I taught them, and the more I watch, the level is amazing.

They have 10 gong-gi in each hand, playing both hands at the same time!

‘Do all elves originally have good reflexes?’

I summon Sylph and Kasa and got away from the kids and headed towards the tree of life.

Underneath the tree of life, the mothers were gathered.

“Have you come? Today you are late.”

I bowed my head.

“Yes, I am sorry.”

“No need. We ask of you again today.”

“Yes. How is the state of the tree of life? Is it effective?”

The eldest mother nodded her head with a happy face.

“We inspected carefully and there is minute, but definite, progress. At this rate, the tree of life will be completely revived within 10 years.”

10 years?!

I shivered.

‘It’s not like spending time there ages you, so it doesn’t matter, no? Is it because you will be lonely every night? Hehehe.’

The bundegi bastard’s words lingered like an alarm in my ear.

“It, it won’t take that long!”

Surely.

Chapter 73 – Unlimited (Part 2)

My flame of life skill was intermediate level 1. And that's because I aggressively poured 1300 karma into it.

‘Thank goodness. What a relief!’

I was thankful to myself for making an impressive decision.

I could have spent 10 years living alone. In that time, that's a long enough period that, who knows, I could have forgotten Min-jeong's face.

“Should I have just used 1800 karma and raised it to intermediate level 2?”

Anyhow, the exam itself didn't pose much difficulty.

I created a flame of life and blew it into the Tree of Life.

‘One more time.’

I made another flame of life and blew it into the tree.

Suh-luh-look-

As the flame seeped in, it felt as if energy was returning to the

Tree of Life. Or it could just be a feeling.

Would they have attached the word 'unlimited' to the task if all it took was these two flames to visibly improve it?

'What is the intent? Why is it unlimited?'

I thought it over thoroughly.

In the previous 4th exam, I spent 30 days here and cleared the exam.

Aside from taking time, it was an easy exam. To top that, spending time with the Tree of Life also increased my spirit summons level.

'Ah...!'

I finally came to a realization.

This exam is giving me a chance to grow and develop.

If you spent a long time here, the longer you spend, the spirit summons level increases.

I was now on the 5th turn and having lost all my comrades, this is a precious chance to increase my capabilities.

‘Good, this is a good opportunity, I’ll use it well.’

I made a firm promise to myself.

No matter how long it takes, I’ll take it, and make a whirlwind growth.

Of course, I’ll be lonely because I can’t see my family and Min-jeong, but I’ll endure and get through it.

As long as I clear the exam I can see them again so there was no need to feel impatient.

I went to the mothers and made one request.

“While I am here, would it be okay to stay by the Tree of Life?”

“By the Tree of Life?”

“Yes. I wish to spend 24 hours a day with the Tree of Life.”

The mothers happily approved it.

“We don’t mind at all. You are our family so it is good no matter how long you wish to spend with the tree.”

“It is good to see that you feel attached with the Tree of Life.”

“Thank you.”

From that day onwards, I started to spend every day with the Tree of Life.

Meals of course, and sleeping too, I did it on top the Tree of Life.

The closer I am to the Tree of Life, the more it increases the spirit summons. I’m using it to the max effect.

Thanks to the reflex entry level 3, spending time atop the tree isn’t difficult.

I’ve got good jumping ability, I can easily hop up and I’ve got good balance too.

After I spent a week like that, the tree felt like a flatland.

“Human oppa is weird.”

“He won’t come down from there.”

“I bet even the red apes don’t like the tops of trees as much as that oppa.”

“He’s like a monkey.”

The young elves looked at me not coming down from the Tree of Life and started a fire of chatter.

But one young girl elf stuck herself to the tree and started to climb up it.

If it was a normal young girl, it would have been impossible, but perhaps its because she is an elf, she bravely made it to where I am.

The young girl elf is none other than Elise.

Nearly abducted by despicable humans, she is the girl who once suffered from anxiety.

“Hehe.”

Elise looked at me and laughed coyly. Aww, so cute.

I want to have her as my daughter but then her unni, Ellie, probably wouldn’t let that happen?

“Hi?”

“Hehe, hi.”

“Isn’t it nice here?”

“Mm, yeah.”

“You want to go up even higher?”

“Uh huh!”

We climbed up the tree together.

The Tree of Life has grown to the sky and the climbing was endless.

If we grasped a wrong limb I could summon Sylph to catch us so there was no danger of us injuring ourselves either.

As we start to go up together, beneath us on the ground the young elves began to rumble.

“What is it? Human hyung and Elise have started going up together!”

“It must be good up there.”

“You think they’re competing to see who can get up higher?”

“I want to go up too!”

“Huh? Me too!”

Is this mob mentality?

The young elves were engulfed in playing now and they all started to climb up the Tree of Life.

I worry that perhaps I have encouraged a useless and dangerous thing to the kids but that was an unfounded security.

“Hohoho, the kids are playing well.”

“When we were young, we played a lot on the Tree of Life too.”

“The more time you spend with the Tree of Life, the more we received good energy from Mother Nature so it is good.”

The mothers looked happy.

I surely cannot look at elves with the same point of view as humans.

I don't think they ever worry about things like falling.

Then again, they've got spirits so they probably don't worry about that. In addition, elves, on a basic level, are more athletic

and physically capable than humans.

But the young elves who have followed me up seems to have gotten bored.

“Hyung, now what?”

“Teach us something fun.”

“Yea, yea.”

“If you brought us all the way up here, be responsible for that.”

I was becoming scared of these little kids.

I pondered while in a cold sweat and finally thought of an idea.

Fine.

It was time to show a new game to these elves.

“Let’s play tag.”

“What’s that?”

“What?”

“Tag what?”

The kids gathered round like a hive of bees and I explained to them the rules of tag.

“If you get caught by the person who is the tagger, that tagged person becomes the new tagger.”

“If you’ve been caught, can you escape?”

“No, if your body is touched by the tagger, you become the next tagger.”

“Then you just need to go far?”

“Let’s say we cannot get off this tree, and we also can’t go up too high either.”

First of all, I become the tagger to show them how it is done.

“I’m going!”

“Kyak!”

“Run away!”

“Hyung’s coming!”

“We can’t get caught!”

The young elves screamed and scatter. Among them, I targeted one girl.

“Kyak!”

The elf girl let out a petrified scream and scrams. She’s scared but her face is laughing.

I moved left and right and trapped the elf girl at the end of a tree branch

The elf girl was cornered when she jumped down.

“What?!”

I’m startled but the elf girl summoned Sylph and rode the wind to a different spot.

“... let’s decide on no spirit summons. If you summon a spirit, you become the tagger.”

“Okay!”

“Got it!”

“This is fun!”

The young elves were excited.

I didn't particularly have anything else to do and this became exercise so it all works out.

The kids have the elf's outstanding athleticism and being familiar with the tree, they are agile.

But still, they were kids.

Thanks to my athleticism entry level 3, I easily caught an elf boy.

“Darn, now I'm the tagger!”

“Haha, Rick is the tagger!”

“Don't get caught!”

The game of tag is a rage.

It is a game but the very militant game of tag catches the eyes of the adults.

At first, they looked pleased that I was playing so well with the kids, but slowly, their eyes changed.

“I think we could use that as training?”

“It makes for very good exercise.”

“If they climb trees well, that is beneficial to battle too.”

The grown-up elf men join in in the game of tag frenzy.

They, at an arranged time every day, gather together and play tag like its training. Of course, at a higher point the adults play themselves.

The kids watch them with me and play from lower on the tree.

‘That part is interesting.’

The top of the Tree of Life.

With a crazy like speed, as the elf men were all playing tag, I watched them and I could not stop my shock.

Their speed was too fast!

Somersaults and handsprings after that, from a skinny sprig they delicately found their balance. Is that human? Or, right, not human.

I am a full-grown adult and I still cannot follow them so I have to hang out with the kids.

But the kids too have gone crazy with this game of tag and have shown immense growth.

They quickly got the knack for it and they climbed well like squirrels.

“Hehehe, try getting me!”

“No, try me!”

From all directions, little kids like monsters taunt me. Now, catching them is becoming more and more difficult.

‘Ugh, let’s just think of this as training.’

As me being it becomes an increasingly frequent occurrence, the fitness intermediate level 1 reached its limit and I became exhausted and panted; this happens more and more.

Not only that, the well-behaved Elise too jumped to a tree opposite and escaped my chase and I felt betrayed.

Although unni Ellie and her lover Jake are happy that Elise has become brighter.

‘There’s no way my fitness is lagging. It must be the difference in stamina.’

I am at Kang Chun-seong’s level of fitness: intermediate level 1.

Could it be possible that Kang Chun-seong’s fitness lagged behind that of kid elves?

I think the problem is the balance that it takes to be on these branches.

But for ten days I continued to treat the Tree of Life and repeatedly played tag.

-Reflex (synthesis skill): knowing how to move your body.

*entry level 4

My fatigue completely disappears and instead, a thrilling ecstasy.

‘My reflex level climbed!’

Staying in the elf village, the skills I can grow were not just the spirit summons.

A simple problem.

Having mastered martial arts all his life, Kang Chun-seong, from the beginning, had an unbelievable level of skill.

Through training, I too can increase my skill level.

Not on flat ground but atop an unfamiliar Tree of Life, living 24 hours a day here, with intense games of tag, I improved my balance.

So it's not strange at all that that increased my reflex level.

'I'll do it like this!'

The spirit summons for sure, the reflex and fitness skills, I decided to increase them.

Its training I do as play so even if it was hard, it was fun too.

"Human oppa suddenly got faster!"

"Hing, we won't be able to catch him!"

“Hyun, your body movements suddenly seem weird! It’s suspicious!”

Thanks to the reflex level going up, I get caught less in tag.

It became a hell of a lot easier balancing and moving on top of the tree.

Once I take a big jump, I shake both my arms while in the air and adjust my balance as I descend, and landed on a branch 10 meters away.

That incredible acrobatics, succeeding in it, it awakened me. Surpassing my previous level, grand movements are possible.

From then on, I don’t get caught in tag by the kid elves anymore.

And then on the 20th day of the 5th exam.

-Spirit summons (main skill): summon a spirit and display strength from mother nature.

*Spirits possible for summon: Sylph, Kasa

*Entry level 3: summon time 2 hours 30 minutes

“Hahahaha!”

The fruits of eating, sleeping, and playing on the Tree of Life. Spirit summons leveled up in 20 days!

‘Just keep going like this.’

I decided to change the taggers up to two people and changed the difficulty level of the game.

The kids’ tag skills instantly improved again, and having seen this from above, the elf men just go ahead with 3 taggers.

“Doing this makes the training more effective.”

“You have to know who the tagger is so it trains the memory and decision making too.”

“He is definitely a human worth of the mothers accepting him as family.”

“Is that human a genius?”

The compliments about me are great.

The greatest worry for me is that the Tree of Life’s recovery is

obvious, I have become someone who cannot be absent from this village.

“Now.”

The incarnate being of temper, Ella, brings us snacks to eat. Apples and strawberries, grapes, and dried things too.

“Thanks to you, Elise has become much better.”

“Oh, thank you.”

If Ella is thanking me, I think I can say all the elves like me.

Chapter 74 – Explosive Growth (Part 1)

The 42nd day.

-Reflex (synthesis skill): develop the ability to move your body more efficiently.

*Entry level 5

As two taggers cornered me in battle hunting style, I superbly escaped.

As I did so, the children exploded in a cacophony.

“What, that human hyung is too good!”

“Hmph, I can’t catch him at all!”

“Don’t be cheap and play with us kids, go play up there!”

“Such foul play, to be playing with the kids!”

It wasn’t long ago when they provoked my slow reflexes, you bastards!

Having become a cheap shot adult who took advantage of winning over children, I had no choice but to move on up where the monsters swarmed.

“Huh? What’s going on, Kim?”

Jake showed interest. We had become close enough that I had moved from being called ‘human’ to ‘Kim.’

The upper parts of the Tree of Life.

If one were to fall from this height, I don’t think the bones could be reset!

Here is the adult elves’ game of tag training grounds.

The game of tag which popularized as a game, the elf men sublimated it, and perhaps that looked like good fun because the women elves participated now too.

“The kids told me to come play up here. Hmph, they used to stick to me and beg to hang out before.”

“You had some difficulty with your balance in the beginning but since then, you seem to have become familiar with it. Considering you’re a human, you’re quite good.”

“Really?”

“Our domain has been invaded by humans several times but I have never seen a human with a sense of balance as great as yours.”

“That’s a joyous compliment. Thanks.”

“Even though in the end you’re still just a human.”

“...”

“There is nothing one can do about the limits one is born with so do not despair too much.”

“I haven’t despaired yet. I haven’t even started!”

“Try to develop it then. If your opponent were to be a woman, then it might be feasible.”

As soon as the words left his mouth, a male elf ran towards us. He must be it.

“Good luck.”

Pat!

Jake flung his body away and avoided the tagger.

The male elf paused momentarily and then set his gaze upon me.

His gaze was asking if I was playing with them too.

I nodded my head.

The elf man smiled, when...

Pat-

He closed the distance in an instant. Just the starting point of the adults was far different from the children.

Playing with grown up elves, this really isn't a game but just pure training.

I had to be the tagger for the mostly the entirety of the game.

But suffering that way, my physical strength buff skill jumped to intermediate level 2. Using all my might to try and catch up to the elves, even without catching up, my skills that passed human levels, rose even more.

It was a fruitful time.

Four months since starting the exam, the Tree of Life now showed a definite recovery.

Even to my own eyes, the Tree of Life showed more vitality.

The ever few sparse and dry leaves were no longer seen but now they were all fresh and green.

“At this rate, within 2 months, the Tree of Life might make a complete recovery.”

At what the eldest mother said, I could not feel any discord.

During the past four months, I had achieved an incredible amount of growth.

-Spirit summons (main skill): summon a spirit and enlist the aid of nature

*Possible summon spirits: Sylph, Kasa

*Entry level 4: summon time 2 hours 45 minutes

-Reflex (synthesis skill): develop the ability to move your body

more efficiently.

*entry level 5

-Physical Strength Buff (assist skill): strengthens the body

*Intermediate level 2: gain the physicality of an adult woman
elf

Look. This great growth.

Of course, it was the result of working hard for 4 months, but without using karma this amount of skill growth was a great benefit.

‘Just a while longer.’

I wanted to clear the mission quickly and go home. I missed my family and I missed Min-jeong too.

Lately at night, I got these thoughts and I overcame them with exercise!

But I couldn’t lose an opportunity like this.

Without the danger of losing my life, growing my abilities, this good of an opportunity, how can I just let it pass me by?

After some pondering, I shared my thoughts with the mothers.

“How about this?”

“...?”

“As you all well know, I can make two flames of life every day. Now, the Tree of Life has recovered substantially, so I will give it one flame a day, and we can use the other flame for other things.”

“Perhaps another tree, you mean another tree that has the potential to become a Tree of Life.”

“Indeed. In this situation where this Tree of Life survives and another Tree of Life were to be born, would it not be of great help to the elves?”

“That is true indeed!”

“If the brown mountain has two Trees of Life, then the prosperity of our elf clan will begin.”

“Suffering elves from other areas will come.”

“The brown mountain will become the elves’ oasis!”

“We shall do this!”

“We will have two Trees of Life!”

“If that happens, we won’t have to worry about anything.”

The mothers’ reactions were explosive.

“Is it really that big of a profit to have two Trees of Life?”

“It is. The Tree of Life is our elves’ foundation of power or so you could say. The energy of mother nature the more it emanates, the stronger we become.”

“Then in that case, how about we do what I proposed?”

“If you would, we would be beyond grateful.”

Thus, it was decided that a flame of life would be used towards growing a different tree.

“Are you Kim?”

A middle-elf couple approached me.

With a few wrinkles, the middle-aged elf man had stately looking face. If he was on earth, it would be more than just a few girls who would go crazy over him.

“I am Derrick.”

The middle-aged elf Derrick is actually the oldest elves in this elf village.

“Hoho, Kim, is this the first time you’ve seen my husband?”

He was the eldest mother’s husband.

It would be easy to see how he would be the top dog amongst the male elves.

“I apologize for not showing my face sooner. Facing a human was uncomfortable so it is true that I have avoided you thus far.”

“You must have a bad memory with humans?”

“We can call it a large-scale invasion. We did fight and win but it was an injurious victory. Well, it was 240 years ago.”

“Now now, I said to forget that now.”

The eldest mother's voice became surprisingly soft.

Indeed, when dealing with her own husband, instead of charisma, she showed aegyo.

Seeing the awesomely aged couples' affection, I was full of jealousy. I wanted to be like that with too with Min-jeong...

Derrick put out his hand.

"You are our savior and family so I shall forget that uncomfortableness."

"Thank you."

I shook hands with Derrick. His hand was full of calloused skin. It was a warrior's hand. He was a man with a great charisma.

'I want to be like him.'

I felt a bromance for this handsome middle aged charismatic elf, Derrick.

"Going forward, I will come every morning to get the flame of life. With that, I will go to the brown mountain, southwest to the pine tree to promote its growth myself."

“Soutwest?”

“It is a distance about 5 km from here.”

I was completely surprised, 5 km. In this harsh terrain, 5 km is a considerable distance. He was going to go and return that every day?

“Is that how you’ve done it straight thus far?”

“Because it is a precious tree that could be our future.”

“Thanks to your sacrifice, we are strong.”

The eldest mother showed aegyo next to her husband. Derrick stroked her hair.

Kuk, he’s so cool.

He is a man among men.

I have fallen head over heels for Derrick’s charisma.

“Excuse me, but would it be possible to go with you every morning?”

“It should be quite a long distance for a human?”

“I don’t really have anything else to do in the mornings. It’ll be exercise too.”

“Doesn’t matter. You’ll have to try hard and keep up.”

“Yes!”

Derrick pat me on the shoulder and went on his way.

‘Kuk, he is so cool!’

The eldest mother, who saw off Derrick, returned to me proudly.

“Isn’t he wonderful?”

“Yes, I think I might fall for him.”

Perhaps she misunderstood me but the eldest mother started looking at me with wary eyes.

In the morning, a 5-km run with Derrick to the tree, there and back.

In the afternoon, tag training with the young elves.

My schedule sorted itself out that way.

“Faster.”

Said Derrick from on up ahead.

I gritted my teeth and increased my speed. I barely kept pace and when we arrived, I was out of breath.

“It’s this rascal.”

Derrick looked with attentive eyes towards a pine tree in front of him.

I was told it was still a young Tree of Life so I had imagined a small sapling.

But in reality, actually seeing it...

‘If this was my world this would definitely be considered a sacred tree.’

Its length was a full 30 m and still growing.

If the Tree of Life were a great tower, this one is a great column.

“This is the third most precious thing we must protect.”

“What are the first and second things?”

“The second is our own Tree of Life. The first is our village children.”

“Ah...”

I think I’m falling for him!

I stared off at Derricks dignified face. If the eldest mother saw me doing this she would have been much warier of me.

“Hurry and do your business and leave. This place is dangerous.”

“Is dangerous?”

“Lots of monsters come this way often.”

“...”

“Humans from the north and lycanthropes from the east, they have been making a ruckus lately but there, there are plenty of young folk. The real dangerous place is here.”

“What kind of monsters are there?”

“The undead.”

“Excuse me?”

“Dead things that have been forced alive but are neither alive nor dead. Those kinds of monsters.”

“Uhh there are things like that?”

“You’re a human and you don’t know? That’s very interesting.”

Derrick looked at me baffled and continued to speak.

“Those that do that kind of thing are humans that practice black magic. The attack 240 years ago was like that too, so there is no way that I can like humans you see.”

“...”

“Of course, you’re the exception.”

Derrick patted me on the shoulder and I felt moved. I’m definitely falling for him!

No matter, zombie movie I had seen, those kinds of monsters, I had no idea they would really exist.

“So then even if you kill the undead, they don’t die?”

“Not so.”

Said Derrick.

“You can go after the black majeong.”

Black majeong?

Now that I think of it, they said in this place, in Arena, monsters and humans, concentrated mana in the form of majeong, resides in the bodies.

It seems the black majeong from the undead serves a similar role to that majeong.

“With black magic, making artificial majeong to revive a dead corpse and making it move. You just have to break that. It is usually in the head.”

Derrick hit me on the back.

“Go now. The bastards do not choose night or day and attack at any time.”

I spoke.

“I want to fight too.”

“You cannot.”

Derrick quickly cut me off and spoke.

“You are a precious one to us. Leave the dangerous things up to the rest of us.”

“I won’t act recklessly. I wish to check how much stronger I have become.”

“This is no place for checking.”

The skill level I’ve raised while spending my time atop the Tree of Life and playing tag.

And the two guns I received from the gun maker Neilson Aslan.

I want to see and compare through battle how much stronger I had become since the last exam.

“Would you throw a rock for me?”

I picked up a rock and handed it to Derrick.

“Where to?”

“Anywhere.”

As I said it, I summoned one Neilson H2 and gripped it in my right hand.

Derrick stared at my gun suspiciously then threw the rock to the front.

The moment it was thrown, I shot the gun.

Tang-bagak!

Before the rock made it past my head, it shattered into pieces.

The shooting skill that has 100% accuracy within 10 m, this was the perfect time to test it out.

Derrick’s two eyes were wide open.

Chapter 75 – Explosive Growth (Part 2)

“How did you do that?”

“I shot at it.”

“What weapon is that?”

Derrick showed interest in my Neilson H2.

“It is a weapon called a gun. A small pellet shoots out at the target.”

“I thought I saw something kind of fly by. I thought I saw wrong but I guess not.”

Wait, this guy, did he just say he saw a flying bullet?

Rather, I should be the alarmed one.

A bullet that whizzes by faster than the speed of sound, he reflexively saw it, that's some beastlike vision.

“Do humans use those kinds of weapons nowadays?”

“No. This is a weapon that only I have. You see, there is only one person who can make this.”

“That is a relief. If humans were to all use that kind of weapon, that would be too much of a threat to us.”

“I don’t think you have to worry about such. But, what do you think? With this much, don’t you think I can partake in the fighting?”

“Hmm...”

“If it becomes dangerous, I’ll remove myself immediately and run for it.”

“Then fine. On one condition.”

“What is it?”

“Do not be apart from me for even a moment.”

“Huk!”

“Mm? What is it?”

“Oh, it’s nothing. I’ll do as you say.”

That stately charisma, please stop. I really think I’ll fall for you!

At this rate, I really may become the eldest mother's love rival.

At Derrick's suggestion that I return for the day, I came back to the village.

During the afternoon game of tag training, I bragged about this to Jake.

"With Derrick ajusshi?!"

"Yep."

"No way!"

"What's the big deal?"

"Derrick ajusshi is our hero! Everyone wants to battle with Derrick ajusshi!"

Jake was ablaze with jealousy.

Ah, the eldest mothers' rivals in love number many. Derrick really is a devil man.

"We want to fight the undead with the ajusshis in the southwest area too. The ajusshis said no which is why we have the safe northeast side."

“They’re worried because it is dangerous.”

“Then why is it that he takes you to that dangerous place!”

“That’s right!”

“Is he discriminating against us!”

Huh?

Suddenly, I’m surrounded by elf men.

“Shouldn’t this be discussed?”

“He can’t think we’re weaker than Kim?”

“No way!”

I really hoped that the elf village didn’t come into discord because of me?

I was tense like this when.

“Oh, by the way, Kim, you’re it.”

A guy tapped me on the back.

The guys scattered like arrows. My face became terribly distorted.

That evening, Derrick and several other older elves returned, and the young male elves gathered round them.

“What is it.”

Derrick’s face was showing suspicion.

“Ajusshi, we can fight the undead too.”

“Why do you not allow us but allow Kim?”

“We’re confident too!”

The girl elves and mothers wondered what was going on and started to gather around too.

Having caught everyone’s attention, Derrick open his mouth.

“The reason I gave permission to Kim to fight with us is because it is a part of his training. Under my guidance, he will grow his fighting sense.”

Derrick looked straight on at the male elves and continued to speak.

“What do you think. Do you too need my guidance? I believe you guys to be trustworthy and respectable warriors.”

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

The young elves have nothing to say.

“I request of you, as I always have, to remain in the northeast.”

Then Derrick leisurely passed through and by the young elves.

The now solemn young elves scattered and I was moved with emotion. Why are you so cool, Mr. Derrick!

Starting the next day, I moved with Derrick.

First of all, I blew a flame of life into the village's Tree of Life, and then gave another to the pine tree that Derrick and I had arrived at.

“From now on, you will have to be careful.”

“Yes, sir.”

I summoned my two guns and moved on with Derrick.

We kept heading in the southwest direction.

Then, when we had arrived at some cliff, we could see some other elves.

“Is that you, Derrick?”

“Ah.”

Based on their appearance, middle aged looking elves greeted him. I’m sure they are all actually over 200 years old.

16 older elf men were lined up along the cliff.

“Has it started?”

Asked Derrick.

“It has, they haven’t let up today either, they keep climbing.”

At those words, I looked below the cliff.

‘Huk!’

It was like a scene from a horror movie.

Here and there, corpses were tenaciously climbing up the cliff.

They were human corpses.

“Kululuk!”

“Kuuuuh!”

“Uhahhhh!”

The yelling zombies.

As if they were deeply craving something. The zombies were climbing up the cliff, headed this way.

“The undead are neither a living nor a dead existence. They have the black majeong so they live and move, but they have no life.”

Explained Derrick, who had approached me.

“The way a starved man searches for food, these bastards are greedy for the life they lack. They are jealous of and greedy of all those who have life.”

At his words, a thought crossed my mind.

“The Tree of Life!”

“Yes. The bastards instinctively come here for their search of the most ample life force.”

“ ... ”

“Then let’s begin.”

Derrick lifted his bow and took out his arrow and demonstrated.

The other elves, likewise, began to shoot the zombies with their arrows.

Swiswiswik-

The arrows flew and shot the zombies one at a time. The zombies who had been hit in the head crashed to the ground along with the zombies who were trailing underneath them.

I couldn’t just stand there.

First, I put away my guns and summoned the Mosin-Nagant.

“Sylph.”

-Meow?

“Shoot those things.”

Sylph nodded her head and then lifted the Mosin-Nagant and aimed. She took the bullet I handed to her and loaded, then began to shoot.

Tang, tang! Tang, tang!

“Kekk!”

“Kawk!”

With every shot, the zombies crashed.

“You use an interesting weapon.”

“Is that that thing you called a gun?”

“It is indeed a scary weapon.”

“Thank goodness no other human but him has it.”

The elves that had been shooting with me showed a momentary interest in me and Sylph but then refocused their attentions on the fight.

But doesn't this seem too easy?

I just had to shoot the zombies before they made their way to the top?

... is what I thought but I was thinking foolishly.

Derrick put his bow back on his back and spoke.

“Time for us to really get started.”

“Huh? Start what?”

“How many do you think there are that we can keep shooting? Doing that would only be a waste of our arrows.”

“Then...?”

“You shall see.”

From the sheath belt around his hips, he drew two swords.

They were very light and slender swords.

Derrick held one in each hand...

“What?!”

I was completely shocked. That was because Derrick jumped down the cliff!

Making a perfect landing below, Derrick spun round and round in circles.

The two swords that were spinning with him were like a whirlwind, hitting all the zombies clinging to the cliff.

Chwajajachwak!

Dozens of zombies rained down in an instant, Derrick hung from the cliffside with his sword stabbed into its side.

He pulled his sword out and at the same time, stepped on a protruding rock and began to climb up.

Scarily wielding a sword in each hand and using just his two feet to climb up the cliffside, Derrick's acrobatics!

Chwachwa-ch-w-a-k!

“Kuak!”

“Ahhh!”

“Kuruk!”

‘Dear Derrick!’

Even his swordsmanship was the epitome of male romance!

“Whew, there’s no way at all that I can copy that.”

“Fighting with double swords off a cliffside can only be done my Derrick.”

“Let’s start too.”

The elves, one by one, pulled out their swords. Different from Derrick, they all had one sword each.

Then they all jumped at once.

Chwachwachwak-

Chwachwak!

“Kururkuk!”

“Kuah!”

“Aghh!”

At the elves’ blow, the zombies rained down.

They clung to the cliff with one hand and held their swords in the other and, as if pulling weeds, cut down the zombies.

-Meow.

I was left all alone on top of the cliff with Sylph, staring blankly at the scene below.

“I, uh, have my pride.”

-Meow?

“I’m not who I used to be. I mean, my physical strength buff is intermediate level 5.”

-Meow.....

Sylph had an expression of telling me not to overdo myself.

Despite that, I pulled out my double guns. Right, the goal is to do it like Derrick.

“Kim, you come with Sylph!”

“... okay.”

Hmph.

I unsummoned the Mosin-Nagant and spoke to Sylph.

“If it looks like I am losing my balance and about to fall, catch me.”

-Meow.

Sylph nodded her head.

For now, I decided to use one gun. With the other hand, I grabbed the crevices and began to make my way down.

Paat, pat!

Using easy and grippable points, I climbed down.

The fruits of my labor from playing tag on the Tree of Life. Who knew that that game would have made the perfect training for this!

To a zombie that had come close, I aimed my gun and pulled the trigger.

“Kuak!”

Its head exploded and the zombie fell. With the zombies trailing behind it, it got tangled and, seeing that, I got a sharp delight. One shot, two kills!

“You did well.”

Without my knowledge, Derrick was beside me and gave me a compliment.

Ah, happiness.

Like a child getting complimented by his mother, I was uplifted and fought even harder.

I’m not just using the gun.

I kicked with my feet and grabbed ankles with my hand and pulled, I concentrated on dropping zombies.

During games of tag, it wasn't just using hands. Rather, it was more often that you would hang from a limb with both hands and tag with the feet.

That effect was being shown now.

‘Should I go for it?’

I summoned another gun and held it in the other hand.

I took a deep breath and began to run along the cliffside.

“Uh la cha!”

As if I was attached to a wire, I raced down the cliffside and recklessly shot my guns.

Ta ta ta tang!

It looked like I was just aimlessly shooting, but thanks to the sense from the shooting skill, I shot four zombies accurately.

Having shot four consecutively, I eventually lost my balance and fell, and Sylph grabbed me.

“Okay, thank you.”

-Meow.

I, again, safely clung to the cliffside.

“You are doing well. If you keep practicing like that you will be able to do as I do.”

With his compliment, this time, Derrick began to chase.

Racing alongside the cliff, Derrick crazily swung his swords.

Every time he swung his sword, it would seem like it had an influence on his balance but it also seemed impossible how he did that without falling.

Derrick stabbed the cliff with his sword in his left hand and while maintaining his position, he haphazardly swung the sword in his right hand and dropped the five zombies around him.

‘I want to be like that someday.’

Even without Sylph’s help, there will be a day when I can move freely along a cliffside as if it was flat ground.

I tried out lots of battle techniques.

Shooting with double guns felt good but it did seem like a waste of bullets.

The best thing was the Divine Protection of the Wind.

I kicked off with all my might with both feet and used the wind to push away the zombies, that fighting style was the best.

When the Divine Protection of the Wind was used up after 15 minutes, I used both hands to grab the cliff and kicked with both feet.

Pat!

“Kuak!”

Pa pa pat!

“Kururuk!”

“Gguhu!”

The wind pressure coming from my feet dropped the zombies.

I think altogether, we got 1000 zombies.

After the fighting, we rested and the elves complimented me.

“You were quite good.”

“You kept very good balance along the cliffside, it wasn’t like a human.”

“A human cannot use his full power if his feet aren’t planted on the ground, but Kim, you are different.”

I replied that it was the results of playing tag and Derrick nodded his head.

“Is that so. I saw that many were working hard with that. It might not be a bad idea to give the opportunity to the young ones.”

It was news that would make Jake very happy.

Chapter 76 – Explosive Growth (Part 3)

Every morning, I fought against the zombies with Derrick and his group. Then, I would spend the afternoon atop the Tree of Life.

Even the time spent stuck next to the tree was very precious.

I had to be by the Tree of Life for the spirit summons to grow.

It was time very well spent.

Since the skill levels just kept climbing.

Being able to feel safe and secure while using just my feet to run along a cliffside that has no footholds while fighting takes a lot of athletic skill.

It also requires immense amount of stamina.

After my body surpassed that of human limits I thought there wouldn't be any situation where my body would get tired but that wasn't the case.

Compared to the male elves, I still had a long way to go.

When the Tree of Life was nearly cured, I switched up the flame of life allocation.

“I will allocate one flame to the Tree of Life every other day. 3 every 2 days will be given to the small tree.”

“Do as you wish.”

Using this opportunity to grow, I planned on dragging it out as long as possible.

Because of that, I purposely chose to postpone clearing the mission.

Because of that, the pine tree with the potential of being another Tree of Life grew well.

And yet, compared to the Tree of Life, the pine tree was incredibly small, but as it received load after load of the flames of life, its growth rate almost became visible to the eye.

Just like that, time flew by and I reached the 12th month.

Now I gave a flame of life to the Tree of Life every 4 days and all the rest was all poured into the pine tree.

The desire to hurry up and get back home was intense, but I held out.

“Now it is done.”

Derrick looked at the pine tree and was very satisfied.

“Now, not only does it possess the potential but it can definitely grow into a Tree of Life.”

“What does that mean?”

“Just because one has potential, does not mean anyone with that potential can use it. There are more people who do not realize their own potential. Whether human or elf.”

“That is true indeed.”

“But this tree has now realized its own potential. It has definitely grabbed its direction on the path to growing into a Tree of Life.

“Then...?”

“Even if we leave it like this, it will become a Tree of Life. No, actually, I guess I can say that it has already become a Tree of Life. Since growing is just a matter of time.”

“That is great!”

“It is all thanks to you. Thanks to the rich life force you gave it, the tree has become stronger and is creating the energy of nature all on its own.”

“It was nothing.”

I was ecstatic at Derrick’s compliment.

“The more I see you, the more impressive of a human I think you are. Not only this tree, but you yourself have experienced a fierce growth in such a short time. Now when I compare you to the young lads, you don’t come up short.”

“Hehe.”

It has already been 12 months.

In all that time, I worked hard and I wasn’t lazy once.

The spirit summons rose to an entry level 6, and the summons time grew to 3 hours and 15 minutes.

The Reflex skill grew to intermediate level 1. When it went from entry level 5 to intermediate, the effect was completely different.

-Reflex (synthesis skill): know how to move your body well

*Intermediate level 1: In all actions requiring body movement, gain genius level abilities.

Look at that new entry! The abilities of a genius it says.

Before that was just good reflexes and knowing how to move my body but now, it was on the same level of a genius.*

Because of it, when I was fighting, now and again I displayed amazing athleticism so much so that some of the elves would stare in awe.

On top of that, the physical strength buff!

-Physical Strength Buff (assist skill): strengthens the body

*Intermediate level 3: Fitness level of an adult elf male

Finally, I have the fitness and stamina of an adult male elf.

‘I’ve really made incredible growth.’

After growing this much, the growth slowed.

The job of fighting zombies along a cliff, or playing a game of tag with the elves, I didn’t feel like it was hard anymore.

Of course if I kept moving with intensity my stamina didn't last but when it came to technique, I didn't feel I was lacking.

The spirit summons stopped at entry level 6 and stayed that way for 3 months.

‘Now, let's clear the mission and go home.’

After deciding that, I revealed my thoughts to the mothers.

“I will now complete the healing of the Tree of Life.”

“Do so.”

The mothers, in matters related to the Tree of Life, entrusted it to me.

For the next few days, I put all of my flames of life into the Tree of Life in the village.

Just like that, 5 days passed.

Pat!

The mission door appeared before my eyes.

‘So, it was done.’

I gently pressed my lips to the Tree of Life.'

'Thank you. For helping me grow.'

I opened the exam door and left.

Bboo-bboo-bboo-

"Congratulations! Congratulations! Great upgrade!"

"Ah, so loud."

I said it was loud and the baby angel blew his horn more boisterously.

I took out a gun and shot at him once before he finally stopped. Pfft, it was within the 100% accuracy range, how did he dodge it?

"Were you really going to kill me?"

"You were within 10m, how did it not hit you."

"Because I am a holy angel."

“Can you say holy through that bbundegi of yours?”

“Now now, enough about that, aren’t you curious about your exam results?”

“I am. Board retrieval.”

-Name: Hyun-ho Kim

-Class: 16

-Karma: +3,600

-Mission: Rest until the next exam

-Time limits: 60 days

“Wow!”

Without realizing it, I was blown away.

“Didn’t you think your growth as of late was crazy?”

“Hold on, my class was a 10 before wasn’t it? How did I jump 6 levels?”

“It is a combination of your exam score and the growth you made.”

It seemed the skills I raised for the past 12 months were factored into it.

Not only that, but also 3,600 karma!

I wondered if this is a dream.

“Getting 3,600 karma in one exam, is this normal?”

“For a fifth exam, it’s a ridiculously abnormal result. It means examinee Hyun-ho Kim made that much of an impact.”

“Hahaha...”

That part was true.

Reviving the elves’ precious Tree of Life was a big role.

Two trees of life!

That contribution was put towards the karma.

“Accounting for how long the exam was, you have been given an appropriate rest period. Please care to rest thoroughly.”

“Okay.”

A rest period of 60 days.

When I returned to reality, I planned to spend my time stuck right by Min-jeong.

How lonely I had been for the last 12 months!

“Now, hurry up and go. A lonely man is unsightly.”

“Shut up.”

I went through the door the baby angel made.

I opened my eyes and it was, without fail, 11 am.

‘I should get the karma prize first.’

Having gotten a whopping 3,600 karma, I was plenty excited.

I summoned my board and ordered.

“Show me all my skills.”

Then appeared, all in a list, the skills I have acquired so far.

-Being displayed are all of examinee Kim Hyun-ho's skills.

-Main skill: Spirit summons (entry level 6)

-Assist skills: Physical Strength Buff (intermediate level 3), Guider (entry level 1), Teleport (entry level 1).

-Special skill: skill synthesis

-Synthesis skill: Divine Protection of the Wind (entry level 1), Divine Protection of the Flame (entry level 1), reflex (intermediate level 1), flame of life (intermediate level 1), transmission (entry level 1), spacial storage (entry level 1), shooting (entry level 1)

-Remaining karma: +3,600

The more I looked at it, the prouder I felt.

There isn't a fifth turn examinee who has achieved as much as I have.

‘Should I raise it starting from the physical strength buff?’

First, I asked the board.

“If I were to raise my physical strength buff to advanced level 1, how much karma would that cost?”

-Physical strength buff (assist skill) to be raised to advanced level 1 I am showing that karma cost.

-Physical strength buff (assist skill): strengthens the body.

*Intermediate level 5: fitness level of an adult male elf

-To get to intermediate level 5 cost is 1,500 karma.

-Aura control: for an examinee who hasn't mastered it, the physical strength buff cannot be raised to the advanced level.”

-Remaining karma: +3,600

‘Huh?’

I was completely surprised at the explanation that an advanced level was impossible.

It seemed the assist skill is affected by the main skill.

“Then the reflex too?”

Then the shape on the board changed.

-Reflex (synthesis skill): Know how to move your body

*Advanced level 1: Gain the abilities of a genius in body movement.

-Advanced level 1 to raise will use 3,600 karma

-Remaining karma: +3,600

If I poured all of my karma into the reflex skill, I could raise it to advanced level 1. In that case, no matter what it is, as long as it involved using my body, I would be a master. It was a level I couldn't even fathom.

Doesn't that mean if I watch someone dance and then copy the dance right after, I would be a master at it?

But I shook my head.

‘It is too ineffective for pouring all my karma into.’

Although it seemed like it would be of good use in day to day activities, the important thing is to become stronger.

‘Let’s raise my physical strength buff first, all the way.’

The spirit summons and rifle and dual guns.

All of these attack methods that I had, putting the physical strength buff above all of them, there was a simple reason to it.

Because it was the safest decision.

First of all, the spirit summons is a main skill so even if I pour in 3,600 karma, I can’t raise the level very much.

Thanks to the Tree of Life having raised my levels, I think it would be ineffective to put it into the spirit summons.

Then the Mosin-Nagant and double guns.

In some respects, it is a very good weapon. Using guns in the Arena civilization that falls behind that of Earth, it is basically

cheating.

But as Cha Ji-hye warned me, that as I go through the exams, there will be enemies that I cannot pierce with my guns.

Accounting for all those dangers, the physical strength buff becomes the safest choice.

First, I'll need a strong body so I won't lose out in strength or fitness.

“I will raise the physical strength buff to intermediate level 5.”

-1,500 karma to physical strength buff (assist skill) has been raised to intermediate level 5.

-Remaining karma: +2,100

Pat!

A light shone out from the board and penetrated me.

I would feel my body becoming even stronger.

‘So this is the limit of an elf's body.’

If Entry level 5 was the limit of a human body, intermediate level 5 was the limit of an elf's body!

Speaking strictly, based only on our bodies I am equal to, if not better than, Derrick.

Of course, I cannot follow in his amazing technique or charisma. Ah, Sir Derrick!

For a moment, I was lost in respect for Derrick, then came back to reality and focused again on the karma prize.

I asked this and that to the board and at the end of thinking thoroughly, this is the decision I came to.

-With 900 karma, I raised The Divine Protection of the Wind (synthesis skill) to entry level 5.

-Divine Protection of the Wind (synthesis skill): using the body, call upon the wind. The power of the skill is based on the user's concentration and skill level along with the spirit summons skill level.

*Entry level 5: Total time 35 minutes. Cooling time 30 minutes.

-600 karma into the spatial storage (synthesis skill) – raised to entry level 4.

-Spatial storage (synthesis skill): Imagine a space and place objects in it. Use 'enter' and 'retrieve' orders to operate the space.

*Entry level 4: 110 x 110 x 110cm

-Remaining karma: +600

This was the optimal choice for making sure I had enough space for the gear I needed to use my guns.

Using the Divine Protection of the Wind for fast movement and a space to store lots of bullets!

I am only a 5th turn examinee.

Later, even if I encounter an enemy that bullets cannot penetrate, it would not be the end. Even if I was faced with a lycanthrope or undead, the guns would work on them.

Even considering the future, there is no downside to raising the levels of these skills.

What should I do with the remaining 600 karma?

It was enough karma to raise an entry level 1 assist skill or synthesis skill to a level 4.

Divine Protection of The Flame?

‘No, right now there is not an immediate use for the Divine Protection of The Flame.’

Shooting?

‘Not that yet either. The 100% accuracy is good enough for within 10 meters and anything beyond that, I can use Sylph for.’

Eventually, I chose this.

-600 karma to raise teleport (assist skill) to level 4.

-Teleport (assist skill): Move in the direction you chose. Think of a direction and say ‘teleport’ to instantly move to that location.

*Entry level 4: Distance 9 m, cooldown time 5 minutes

-Remaining karma: 0

At entry level 1, the distance was 1 m, and the cooldown time was an hour.

Even with a higher level, the distance didn't change much. But at least the cooldown time had a significant decrease.

'I'm sure if I increase the level a little more I can use it consecutively without a cooldown.'

I then thought that if I could teleport without any limits, that would just be the biggest cheat.

Chapter 77 – Leaving The Nest (Part 1)

“Oppa, do you notice anything different about me?”

If you want to scare a man, just ask him this question.

But thankfully, the thing that was different was very noticeable.

“You cut your hair?”

“Hehe, yeah.”

Min-jeong spun around in a circle.

Min-jeong, who had long straight hair, was now sporting a brown tone dyed bob.

Whether it is a C-curl perm or whatever, I wasn't positive, but it sure was pretty. It's been a year since I've seen her so, no matter what, she's lovable.

“Why change your hair all of a sudden? Did you get dumped?”

Min-jeong giggled.

“I'll be graduating college soon.”

The graduation is next year but classes are over in a few days so in reality, that was the end of college she said.

“Are you going to move up north as soon as you graduate?”

“I’m still looking for a place. I’ll move as it becomes available.”

I thought for a moment then said.

“I was thinking of moving out too, want to go to the same neighborhood?”

“Really?”

“Yeah, it’s about time anyway. I have enough money too.”

“Wow! So, we’ll still be together then?”

“Hur hur, I will chase after you no matter where. Didn’t you know I’m a bit stalkerish?”

“I don’t know about the stalker thing but you definitely have a little bit of a whipped husband thing.”

“Kuk, I cannot deny that.”

“Hehehe.”

Min-jeong stuck right by me.

The scent of her hair is so good. I was smelling Min-jeong for the first time in a year.

Then Min-jeong suddenly looked at me and tilted her head.

“That’s weird.”

“What is?”

“Why does it seem like we haven’t seen each other in a while?”

“Oh, really?”

“Yeah, it kind of feels like you’ve gone to the army and you’re a boyfriend out on your first break.”

I flinched.

“What about me feels like that?”

“The point that you’re very touchy?”

“ ... ”

Her sixth sense is really sharp. Is she a ghost.

We watched a movie and drank coffee as we talked, and we mostly discussed about which neighborhood to move to.

Min-jeong said the company she'll be working at is in the Gasan Digital Complex.

“My relative oppa says Bucheon is a good place to live. There are a lot of malls and supermarkets and good amenities.”

“Yeah? Then should we find out right away about Bucheon?”

I downloaded a real estate app on my smartphone and checked out Bucheon.

Min-jeong was hard at work tapping away on her smartphone too.

I searched in order of most expensive.

At the top is an efficiency apartment (a newer condo basically), the highest penthouse. The price is a sum of \$1.14 million USD.

Perhaps the maintenance fees are a lot but there's a lot of chatter on it about it feeling like a rental.

‘Well, I’m crapping money so.’

Progressive tax or not, it doesn’t have anything to do with me.

4 rooms, 2 bathrooms, the city scene is spread out like a screen.

More than anything, the size is more than 60 square meters. The vast terrace was very cool. Looking at the photo, it was called a terrace but it was no different than a lawn.

‘It’s cheap, I should get one.’

It was not cheap at all but in my swiss account I have more than \$26 million USD, so.

“Oppa, what are you looking at?”

Suddenly, Min-jeong looked at what the house listings I was looking at and was shocked.

“Heek! Oppa, you’re going to buy this?”

“Yea, I think I might.”

“Isn’t it too expensive?”

“It’s only 1.14 million.”

“Only...”

Min-jeong looked at the penthouse pictures, one by one, with a strange look on her face.

“Nice, right?”

“Oppa, I’m so jealous! How nice would it be if I could live somewhere like this!”

“Between us, what do you mean. Come over any time.”

“You mean it?”

“Of course.”

Honestly, I wanted to move in together.

But let’s start out with coming over.

If she comes over a lot, there will be more days where she stays at my place instead of her one bedroom, and eventually, it will be natural for her to move in.

‘Hur hur hur.’

From living alone for 12 months, my head went down treacherous paths very easily.

“I should use this one as my bedroom, huh? Since it has an attached bathroom and dressing room.”

“Yeah! And this room would be good for your office.”

“Office? I don’t really have anything to work on.”

“But you can put your computer and books and it can be an all-purpose room.”

“Ah, that sounds good.”

“And the one remaining room can be the guest room! How about a room for sleeping in guests? Decorated like a hotel room.”

“That’s nice.”

“Hehe, isn’t it?”

Min-jeong’s eyes were sparkling and she put up opinions passionately as if it was her house.

And every time she did, I would agree and smile at her. Ok, Min-

jeong, this house is your house.

“Angg, oppa, you must be so happy. It’s like a rich person’s house from a drama. Look at this terrace. It’s a total trail!”

“Don’t you think it would be good for raising a big dog here? Maybe a Siberian husky.”

“Aw, that would be the best.”

Her face looked as if any second now, she’ll run out of breath.

I thought that this was the moment and I slipped in my words.

“This room, I can make it up as a guest room like you said, and you can come over lots and spend the night there, no?”

But Min-jeong’s face suddenly changed.

“Guest room? You won’t have me sleep next to you but you’ll send me away to the guest room?”

“Huh? Uh, no.”

“Hmph...”

Min-jeong pretended to be sulking. Yep. She’s definitely

pretending to be sulking.

I have to find out why she's suddenly pretending to be sulking.

‘What is it?’

It was definitely a coy act to get some kind of answer.

‘Hmm, is it that?’

I gave her the most exemplary answer I could think of and tried it out.

“I thought it would be too much pressure if I asked you to live with me, so.”

“Oh, oppa...”

Now Min-jeong was pretending to be surprised, pretending to be moved. Cute thing.

“But isn't it too fast for us?”

... look at this child?

I gave her the response she wanted but instead of grabbing it, she's toying some more?

If she's going to be this way, that changes it a bit.

"Is it?"

"Yes..."

"You're right, I think I was being too selfish. I'm sorry I pressured you."

"Uh, no, that's okay."

Min-jeong had a reluctant face.

If this is what you want, let's pull and tug a bit.

The boyfriend has a luxurious penthouse, see if you can go back to your one room place.

As the talk of us moving in together ended like that, Min-jeong's face became full of regret.

We finished all the coffee and got up when Min-jeong said.

"Let's go to my place today. I'll make you food."

It looked like her face was full of spirit.

“Okay, are you going to make me something good?”

“I’ll make you what you like the most. We can pick up groceries on our way.”

“Okay.”

On our way, we stopped by the store and grabbed some groceries.

Pork, carrots, onions, they all went in the basket. Min-jeong seemed full of determination.

‘Hang in there.’

I just felt so happy.

We got back home and Min-jeong got busy in the kitchen and made a sweet pork stew for me.

‘How long has it been since I’ve had meat.’

I ate only produce with the elves for a year and I was moved as I ate my meal. I emptied two bowls of rice.

“Are you full?”

“Yeah, that was really good.”

“Then do you want to wash up together?”

“... Huh?”

Min-jeong grabbed my hand and headed to the bathroom.

That day, from being coy in the wrong direction, Min-jeong cooked a generous meal then went off to the bed, a full course of making me happy.

Naked, she was cuddled in my embrace and whispered.

“Was it good?”

“Yeah.”

This one day, today, was like I had gone to heaven.

“Hehe, us being like this, it’s like we’re a married couple, huh?”

I got it, so you can stop nagging.

“Let’s live together, Min-jeong.”

“Aw, bringing that up again.”

Like a habit, being coy again. Is this a bad habit of yours? It’s a conditioned reflex?

“Whew, sorry. I said I wouldn’t but there I go again.”

“What?”

Min-jeong was in a dilemma.

“I won’t bring this kind of stuff up anymore. I’m really sorry.”

Then,

“Crap!”

In a sudden rage, Min-jeong pinches me on the thigh.

I screamed out in laughter.

First, we made the decision, and having money was no problem.

I gathered the family together to tell them I was moving out and they all agreed.

Unlike my past of being a jobless man, now that I have a proper job now, moving out is not an issue at my age is what they thought.

“And you’ve got a place?”

At mom’s question, I nodded my head.

“There was a decent one room.”

Of course, the scale of my net worth remained a secret to my family. Because they’ll definitely want to know the origin of my money.

Unlike stupid Hyun-ji, mom and noona won’t believe the story I made up.

After informing my family, I quickly headed up to Bucheon the next day.

I met with the real estate agent that I had contacted earlier and together, we inspected the penthouse for sale.

“It’s nice.”

The house was much cooler than how it had looked in the pictures. The feeling of grandness could be felt.

“There isn’t a property like this elsewhere. If you’ve got the money, this is the house that everyone would want to live in.”

“I can pay cash in a lump sum but can you cut it down to 1.08 million?”

“Whew, even now, it is already pretty cheap...”

“Then there’s nothing?”

At my question, the real estate agent said

“Hmm, I’ll put in a good word and cut it down as much as I can.”

Saying I’ll pay cash right then, the owner said he’d take 1.1 million.

It isn’t that I’m stingy about this but if it can be done cheaper, then it should be done for cheaper.

I signed the papers right away and wire transferred the money and the penthouse becomes mine.

“Can you find a decent one room for me as well?”

“Why a one room?”

“To use for lots of things.”

If mom or noona visit, Min-jeong’s parents ambush, a break up with Min-jeong. All these situations need this extra one bedroom just in case.

In the penthouse, basic amenities like a fridge, gas range, electric range, oven, and drum washer were included but other than that, it was completely empty.

Having bought it in a flurry in one day, I didn’t get the feeling that this was my house.

I shook my head and mumble.

“Should I buy a bed first?”

I might as well get a king size.

Using the smartphone memo app, I made a list of things I needed as I thought of them.

Bed, desk, computer, TV, table, sofa.

What else was there?

I attached the memo and sent it as a text to Min-jeong.

In a little bit, Min-jeong sent back a text.

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: cooking utensils, tableware, toiletries, bath items, bookcase, oh and do you have a dresser?]

[Me: Yep each room has a closet installed and I have the dressing room.]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Can't we pick out furniture together?]

[Me: Why not, we're living in this house together]

[Yoo Min-jeong^^*: Aww ♥♥]

Just like that, I became independent.

The next day, I went to the mall with Min-jeong and wandered around and did some fortune shopping.

King sized bed.

A modern style desk and table, sofa, amidst other things.

I got a vanity desk for Min-jeong but, thinking about it, I needed a something too for doing my hair and rubbing things in my face and whatnot.

“Ah hungg (Ahhh), I’m so happy!”

Min-jeong was drunk in the fun of throwing all this money around.

Not being restrained by money, but buying the things that appeal to you the most, how sweet that is.

At the electronics store, we decided to get an 85-inch TV.

“Watching dramas on this will be like a movie theatre.”

“A theatre...”

Then booming sound is required.

Why not, I buy an audio system too.

I don’t have much desire for a computer so I get a decent all-in-one PC.

The great march of impulse buying!

We bought everything we needed in a day.

“I think we’re crazy.”

The excitement was still not gone and Min-jeong’s face was flushed red.

“Well, it’s all stuff we needed anyway.”

It was just that each thing was expensive.

That day, we got home and waited and the items we ordered started to come in like a moving truck.

Every time the employees brought the ordered items and set them up, the completely empty penthouse started to turn into a house with people living in it.

“Wow! I have to take a picture of this!”

The giant screen TV and audio were being set up and, seeing that in the living room, Min-jeong took a selfie and couldn’t contain herself.

“Wait, you’re not sending it to Hyun-ji, are you?”

“Oh right, I won’t send it.”

Can’t relax.

Hyun-ji knew that I had lots of money, at least she got the gist of it when we went on the Europe trip, but she didn’t know yet that I’m actually this rich.

If she were to see the sum in my account, there’s no telling how clingy she would become.

Chapter 78 – Leaving The Nest (Part 2)

I woke up and jumped off the sofa.

Min-jeong, overcoming all of the obstacles, managed to hang onto the tiny sofa, sleeping well, stuck right next to me.

Why are we like this?

Ah.

I remember.

In the middle of the night, we had connected the laptop to the big 85-inch screen TV and were watching a movie.

Leaving a king size bed empty, we spent our first night in the new house here, my goodness.

I easily lifted Min-jeong and moved her to the bed. I tried to leave after doing so when Min-jeong fidgeted and grabbed ahold of me with both her arms.

Our lips met and I slipped her shirt using my right hand. She must not have liked that because she lightly brushed it away. Still sleepy I see.

I gave her a light kiss and grabbed my smartphone and left the

room.

The 60-meter sq. terrace is as big as a yard I walked around it as I made a phone call.

-Did you do well in your exam?

The person on the other line was Odin.

“Yes, I cleared it safely.”

-That is good. I am the same. There was not anything difficult but it somehow felt like the calm before a storm.

“...?”

-Do you remember Viscount Bastian?

“Of course.”

-They told me to prepare for war against him. That was the last exam.

“War?”

-Indeed. Last time, to help you, the dispatched army lost to them. I can't just let it pass.

I'm getting a feeling that the situation in the Arena is flowing rather unnaturally at the moment.

"If that was the exam, would it be correct to assume that the Arena gods want Viscount Bastian to be attacked?"

-That was my guess as well. The exam was probably like that since the goal is to mount an attack against Viscount Bastian.

"I think everything that is happening is centering around the elves on the brown mountain."

-Elves? Are you by any chance with the elves over that way?

"Yes."

-Surprising. There probably isn't another examinee who can contact the elves.

I gave him a simple explanation of the happenings around the brown mountain.

The silver clan lycanthropes to the east of the brown mountain.

Viscount Bastian to the north.

To the south, the disgusting undead that are creeping up the cliffside.

I could not get rid of the feeling that there were attacks from all sides of the elves.

“If Viscount Bastian makes a deal with the silver clan, the humans that recently tried to kidnap the young elf can be accounted for as deeds done by Viscount Bastian.

-Hmm...

“Do you know about a black magic wizard?”

-Black magic is already one of the forbidden magics from the previous nation. Originally, it was a field that it came about from researching eternal youth and immortality.

“The undead are attacking the elves’ territory in hordes, how about thinking of the silver clan and Viscount Bastian and black magic as all linked?”

-You mean to see it very broadly. For sure if we look at it that way, we can also say that the situation being orchestrated from behind involves some kind of group or influence that is targeting the elves.

“Couldn’t they be the ultimate goal of the exam?”

-That would be a hasty conclusion.

“I suppose.”

-No need to make things so difficult for ourselves. In the end, all we need to do is clear the exams we are given.

Odin continued to say.

-I will annihilate Viscount Bastian in the next exam. On your side, you will probably fight with the undead or the lycanthropes.

“Yes, more than likely.”

-Then destroying two of the three will break the alliance.

“I see. I just have to clear the exam I’m given.”

-The direction we should be going in, we should expect that the exam will specify that for us.

“Yes.”

I had a different opinion on that part.

I think we have to anticipate ahead of time about what the gods want.

The reason I was able to make such an explosive growth was because I did that.

-Anyhow, I expect good things in the next one from you as well.

“Yes, you too.”

-And...

“Go ahead.”

-I hear chairman Park Jin-seong has made a full recovery.

“Yes.”

-What is your given length of rest period this time?

“It is 60 days. I have 58 left now.”

-Can I make one request?

“Your daughter?”

-You are quick to catch on.

It was obvious since he brought up chairman Park Jin-seong's complete recovery first.

“Would it be possible for my daughter to stay with you until the end of the year?”

“That would be fine.”

“Thank you. What would you like in compensation?”

I thought about it carefully.

First off, not really money. I have plenty now.

If possible, I wanted it to be useful in Arena. He is a lord in Arena after all.

“I heard that elves are being distributed as slaves in Arena.

-There are such bastards out there. It is always noble families that are full of themselves. They think that a rare slave that is difficult to catch, like an elf, shows their status. I believe in human rights from a modern earth so that sort of thing makes me gag.

“Would it be difficult for you to gather as many elf slaves as

possible and buy them and send them my way?”

-Elf slaves?

“Yes, and with that opportunity, Odin’s family and the brown mountain elves can make an alliance.”

-That is a good idea!

Odin loudly votes yes.

-I am in the middle of war preparations, thus attaining elf slaves will not be easy, but if we can build friendly relations with the brown mountain elves, it is definitely worth trying.

“Then consider that as my compensation.”

-Is that all? This makes me a profit.

-Good is good. If we do that and it is a help to the elves then that is my contribution as well.

-Understood. I will do that. You are laying a bridge for me and the elves.”

“Good.”

-I will let you know before my daughter gets there.

The phone call ended like that.

I returned to the bedroom and Min-jeong had thrown off her clothes and was gesturing to me.

Does she think I went outside because I was sulking for being turned down earlier?

Seeing her nude, I forgot all worldly thoughts.

Good is good.

I decided to pretend I was upset for the rejection earlier.

The other empty room was going to be a guest room like Min-jeong suggested.

We got a small bed and a vanity so that no matter who comes that it would be a good atmosphere for a few days.

When Odin's daughter comes, she can sleep here.

While we're at it, I decided to decorate the terrace too.

For my training, I got a sandbag and a mu ren zhuang* and set it up outside.

It appears often in Chinese martial arts movies, with arms, legs, and trunk made of wood.

I'm not sure it'll make for good practice but I thought that it might so I went ahead and bought it. I had lots of money and the impulse to buy it was strong.

I thought why not and bought the mu ren zhuang but I ended up liking it more than I thought I would.

As a martial arts newbie, I didn't know how or what to do with this thing, but by watching martial arts videos on YouTube, little by little, I was able to copy it.

Reflex intermediate level 1.

I was easily able to follow the movements from the YouTube videos.

I was quickly able to figure out the motions and I began to practice actual fighting from those movements.

I had a gun in each hand and practiced on the mu ren zhuang.

By applying the movements, as I went between the jangsu, I aimed the guns at the body.

Pa pa pat!

My arms got faster and faster.

With my physical strength buff at intermediate level 5, my body was like steel and even with my wrists bent, I held the guns while shooting since there was no way they would get hurt from the recoil.

Because of that, I fought freely with the mu ren zhuang as my opponent while using guns for close combat fighting.

‘Although I don’t know if this will be effective in real fight.’

For now, I do it as a way to kill time.

Not only that, I practiced kicking on the sandbag.

Pu pu puk!

I kicked with all my might and jumped and tried a triple kick.

In midair, I twisted by body and kicked, with one hand on the ground, I landed and did that two more times in a row.

The reason I kept practicing a difficult move like this was that when I was fighting the undead while hanging on a cliffside, I used a lot of kicks.

I was practicing this in case I ran into a situation where I couldn't control my body's center of

gravity well while kicking.

“Oppa, come eat!”

I could hear Min-jeong's voice coming from inside.

Only then did I stop exercising and went into the kitchen and saw the feast prepared on the table and I was blown away.

“You did all this?”

“Hehe, it's a special day, I marinated this yesterday.”

Braised short ribs.

I gave Min-jeong a kiss on her cheek and ate like a madman.

Min-jeong looked at me happily and, at that moment, almost looked like a wife.

This really made us feel like newlyweds.

Even though this relationship started without much thought and just from temptation, the more I dated her, the more I thought that Min-jeong was a fine woman.

‘If I clear all the exams, getting married wouldn’t be bad.’

Later, I don’t know how our feelings might change.

I didn’t dare to think about it too deeply

Because now, I don’t know when I might suddenly die in the exams and I couldn’t make promises of the distant future. So I didn’t want to bother with it. That’s all.

“Oh right, Min-jeong.”

“Yes, oppa.”

“I’m going to have a foreign guest soon.”

“Foreign?”

“Yeah, it’s the daughter of a person I know and I said I would watch her until the end of the year. Is that okay?”

“Someone’s daughter... well how old is she?”

“Not sure? I’m guessing pretty young?”

“Whew.”

Min-jeong let out a sigh of relief. Haha.

“Then that’s okay. And no if she is over 15.”

“What do you mean over 15, aren’t you giving me a way too big of a zone range?”

At my dissatisfaction, Min-jeong giggled.

Then, a few days, I get a call from Odin.

-In Korean time, Isabella will arrive tomorrow at 8:40 am.

“Isabella?”

-You can call her Bella. If you see the most beautiful blonde child, that is Bella.

What is this sudden change.

Him saying such stuff so sincerely took me by surprise.

The next morning, I went to Incheon airport like Odin said. Min-jeong insisted she come along and got in the passenger seat.

“Before I see her with my own eyes I cannot believe she won’t be an adversary.”

“... it is not like all the women in the world pass me notes into my breast pocket.”

“Hmph! You’re not contacting this gal, are you?”

“Like I said, I’m not.”

“Then show me your smartphone.”

“Have at it.”

I unlocked the phone with the code and handed the smartphone to Min-jeong.

Min-jeong flipped through the call log when suddenly she started doing something to it.

“What are you doing?”

“It’s not anything.”

“You’re not doing anything weird?”

“Nope.”

Then my smartphone vibrated.

“Huh? You have a call.”

“Give me.”

The caller id is...

[Cutey Wife <3]

“... ..”

“Hehe, aren’t you going to pick it up?”

She was hard at work clicking away and it was this.

I answered the phone.

“Hello.”

“Hello.”

“Yes, is this the person that is my wife?”

“Hehe, this is.”

“This is the person that roams around clubs with Hyun-ji, yes?”

“Aw come on, it’s been a long time since I quit that. It’s not fun anymore.”

“Did you really though? Won’t the true nature of going to play at clubs come out at some sudden point?”

“No can do. My husband is a bit of a stalker.”

“Oh darn, that must be exhausting for you.”

“No one says otherwise. He bothers me so much every night, my hips are aching lately.”

“... ..”

“Not only that, but suddenly he’s gotten much better at it. Isn’t it suspicious? What bitch would he have practiced with?”

That, my girl, is because my physical strength buff level increased. Who would have known that that would have had its effect in that department as well.

“That... is because your husband is a genius.”

Finally, Min-jeong exploded in laughter while grabbing her stomach and bent over laughing.

Chapter 79 – Bella (Part 1)

“Let’s go, cutie.”

“Yes, Mr. Genius.”

We parked the Porsche cayenne in the parking lot and went into the entrance of the Incheon Airport.

We arrived at the entrance of the arrival doors where the people were pouring out.

People were reuniting and hugging each other. It was quite a sight.

“Oppa, but shouldn’t we be holding a picket (sign) or anything?”

“I wonder.”

“How will you identify her?”

“He said his daughter is the prettiest blonde girl.”

“... is that trustworthy information?”

“Anyway, it’s time so let’s take a look.”

It was true that Odin was a handsome and gorgeous blonde man. If she is like him, she could be very beautiful.

It was about 9 am.

People started pouring out of the gate again.

And one group immediately popped out.

A small blond girl and a foreign woman in black formal wear.

“Oh my goodness! She’s really pretty!”

Min-jeong was in awe.

I was also in awe.

She was really cute!

With blonde hair, delicate and pale skin, round blue eyes.

Like Odin said, she is pretty and was immediately noticeable. Enough to be afraid of.

Audacious Min-jeong waved her hand like mad.

The middle-aged woman must have noticed us as well because she started heading in our direction.

“Kim?”

“Yes.”

I was afraid she'd speak to me in a foreign tongue and say blah blah blah but thank goodness.

She handed a large trunk bag over to me.

I looked at the small girl.

“Bella?”

Bella smiled giddily and nodded her head.

“Oh my my.”

At her fatal laughter, Min-jeong was once again hit directly in the heart.

I looked at Bella and introduced myself.

“Hyun-ho Kim.”

“Hi-no.”

“Hyun-ho.”

“Hi-no.”

“Hyun, Ho!”

“Hi, no!”

“Stop it already!”

Min-jeong slapped me on the back. The middle-aged foreign lady looked at this and smiled.

“Hi? I am Min-jeong Yoo. Min-jeong.”

“Min-jeong.”

“Why is that one so accurate!”

I said in anger and Min-jeong slapped my back again.

Bella lifted her skirt a little and greeted us.

“Oh my, oh my!”

I think Min-jeong’s eyes have turned into hearts.

Suddenly, in no time at all, Bella was embraced in Min-jeong’s arms. I was just left to drag the trunk bag full of Bella’s things.

The middle-aged lady gave Bella a kiss and said goodbye and left somewhere, and we left with Bella to the parking lot.

Min-jeong sat with Bella in the backseat and I drove in front all alone.

In one moment, a newlywed and now that there was a child I had become a non-priority husband.

From what I heard, Bella was nine years old that year.

Incredibly bright and not a shy child, she had no problem becoming to Min-jeong.

Well, Min-jeong has pretty tough skin too. They already seemed like a mother and daughter.

We arrived at the officetel (condo) in Bucheon and went up in the elevator when Bella suddenly wavered and nearly fell when Min-jeong caught her.

“Oh gosh, are you okay?”

She didn't understand but got the gist of it and Bella nodded her head.

My face became grim.

It wasn't like it happened while she was walking, it was weird that she nearly fell so suddenly while just standing. This could be what Odin was saying, Bella's disease.

We guided Bella to the room that we had made the guest room.

“Let's unpack your things together.”

Min-jeong unpacked Bella's things from her trunk and began to organize them in the closet.

Hanging the clothes on hangers and putting the undergarments and socks in the drawers.

She puts the couple picture books in Danish on the vanity.

And then an unexpected item appeared from the trunk bag.

“Violin?”

Min-jeong was surprised and asked and Bella just smiled and nodded her head.

It was definitely a small one, child sized.

“Play a bit, will you? Hmm?”

Min-jeong tried to hand her the violin and beg but Bella smiled uneasily and shook her head back and forth.

I stopped Min-jeong.

“She almost fell earlier too and I think she’s tired today.”

“Oh right. Unni is sorry.”

Min-jeong pecked Bella on the cheek with a kiss.

It was when the two amicably have unpacked and were hanging out when I got a call from Odin.

I went out to the terrace to take the call.

“Hello.”

-Has Bella arrived?

“Yes, as you said, she is very beautiful.”

-I do not lie.

“... ..”

-Anyway, how is Bella’s condition?

“She nearly fell and we caught her.”

-... is that so?

“What disease is Bella suffering from?”

-It is Lou Gehrig’s.

“Huh?”

At the sound of a scary disease, I’m completely surprised.

I don’t know it well, but the muscles progressively don’t listen and in the end, you are unable to breathe and thus die, a scary disease, is what I know of it.

The most famous person with this disease now is Stephen

Hawking.

“Is the disease genetic?”

-Among this disease, patients have a 5 – 10 % of inheriting amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, and of those, 20% of them are associated with a mutation on the 21st chromosome.

“... ..”

The medical knowledge flowing from his lips.

How severe Odin’s heartache must be, that this is his way of expressing it.

-Before this, the symptoms had not really appeared, but not long ago, Bella cried. I asked her why. She said her fingers weren’t moving well and so she couldn’t play the violin... ..

His voice sounded so miserable that I quickly changed the subject.

“I will try and fix her. Do not worry.”

-Thank you.

I ended the call and returned to the room Min-jeong and Bella

were in.

“Min-jeong, isn’t it about time to eat?”

“It’s only 10 now.”

“Really? Then why do I feel so empty.”

“Is our Bella hungry too?”

Min-jeong rubbed her belly and then pretended to eat something.

Bella made her especially cute smile and nodded her head.

“Okay, hold on just a wee bit.”

Min-jeong whistled as she disappeared into the kitchen.

Now was the perfect time.

I made a flame of life.

Bella’s eyes became big and wide when she saw the flame that appeared on my hand. How could even her surprised face be so cute.

I push the flame into Bella's body.

At first, Bella was completely surprised, but as the flame seeped into her, finally, her surprised face strangely changed.

“It feels good, right?”

I gave her a smile. Bella found it all interesting and followed up with a smile.

I handed the violin again to Bella.

To Bella's hesitant hands, I suggested it again.

Briefly, across her face, she showed a nervous expression.

And then the performance began.

Monotonous but wonderful. It was a melody I think I have heard somewhere before.

Our eyes met and Bella smiled again.

I smiled back.

His daughter is his treasure to Odin, Isabella was truly an adorable and lovable child.

Min-jeong had quickly rushed over to listen to Bella's playing together.

"You are so good, dear Bella."

Having finished her performance, Bella hugged Min-jeong and rubbed her cheeks against her. Bella giggled happily.

Bella, with the flame of life administered, unlike earlier, has become much more spirited. The fatigue from riding long hours on a plane, all of it has disappeared.

Min-jeong was hard at work on something in the kitchen for quite a long time.

"Should I come help?"

"It's all done."

What she has made is a Korean sweet called Maejagwa (Korean fried cake).

Flour and cinnamon, ginger, sugar, honey, put together and whisked and shaped into a pretty shape and fried into a cookie.

"You, you know how to make this kind of stuff too?"

“I learned it a while ago. It takes a lot of work. Just know you’re being spoiled today.”

“Wow, its thanks to my cutesy wife that I’m living in luxury.”

“Hehehe.”

I gently came up behind her and gave her a hug and she liked it quite a bit.

At the same time, we heard the sound of Bella’s violin again. Her hands have returned to their original state and she must have been excited so she started diligently playing.

What excellent background music this is. Thanks to a beautiful melody, a strange atmosphere flowed.

I could hear Min-jeong’s heartbeat in my ears.

The atmosphere such that I can’t not say something romantic. What is this? How did it suddenly get like this?

All of a sudden, plunged into too much pressure, I groaned inside and considered what to do.

I couldn’t help it and said.

“I guess I’ll have to repay you tonight.”

Puk!

“Kuk!”

With all her might, Min-jeong stepped on my foot.

“What is that! And did I or did I not say earlier that my hips were hurting?”

“You, you did. I thought you were just saying that... ..”

“Lately, the nighttime is scary! You’d strangely become really good and your stamina is monstrous!”

The romantic feeling has passed.

... is what I thought but that apparently wasn’t the case.

Min-jeong pushed out her hips to me and said something.

“Start over from the beginning. The music hasn’t stopped yet.”

“Uh, okay.”

She really isn't your average girl. Who would ever say she wasn't friends with Hyun-ji.

I hugged her again from behind and whispered in her ear.

“I love you.”

“... again.”

“I love you.”

“With my name to it.”

“Min-jeong, I love you.”

“Again.”

“I love you, Min-jeong Yoo.”

“Again... ..”

I glanced at her face. I could see the tears welling up in her eyes.

I gently grabbed face and kissed her.

“I love you.”

Bella really enjoyed eating the maejakgwa. Crunch, crunch, chewy and sweet, the aftertaste that lingers is the best.

The whole while we're eating we frequently looked at each other.

On account of how frequently our eyes met multiple times, we just laughed every time it happened.

We could call it the Bella Effect.

After that day, our relationship changed from how it was before. To say what was different would be difficult to explain in words.

After that day, bold and brazen and bubbly Min-jeong somehow was like a teenager and became very shy.

She was conscious of me and bashful, and even was shy changing her clothes in front of me.

Even while laying down using my arm as a pillow, a moment later, in case my arm hurt, sneakily separating and covering me to my neck with the blanket.

I used to like looking at each other but now, I like when she looks at me and I'm not looking.

Something has changed in a big way.

Whether that is a good thing or a bad thing, there is no way to know.

Every day, I gave 2 flames of life to Bella.

They were the flames of life that treated the great Tree of Life that reached to the sky.

Bella became very lively.

Considering that the beginning signs of Lou Gehrig's had happened to this child, she was unbelievably mischievous.

'That's her real personality.'

A bright personality that smiled easily and wasn't shy, she became friends with others very easily.

I am sure that Bella was originally a brighter child than any other.

One day, Bella gave me the violin.

“You want me to try?”

We couldn't communicate, but at my question, Bella nodded her head and pretended to play the violin.

“Alright, should I try and learn?”

I put the violin on my shoulder and put the bow to the strings and make a sound. Is this how to do it?

Keek.

Bella laughed ecstatically.

Alright, this time I won't fail.

I tried to make a sound again.

Keek!

Bella covers both her ears with her hands.

After trying a couple times, I'm able to make a sound.

Jiiing-

Bella looks surprised.

I'm surprised too.

‘You see, my reflex skill was intermediate level 1.’

I was even able to easily follow the mu ren zhuang training.

But making the right sound from the violin wasn't easy. It is an atrociously difficult instrument to handle.

But it not being easy... ..

‘Means it counts as training?’

I stared blankly at Bella's child-sized violin.

I have found a new way to increase my reflex skill!

Chapter 80 – Bella (Part 2)

I started researching violins on the internet.

The first thing I learned was that they were ridiculously expensive?

The violin itself is crazy expensive, so is the bow, and the case they go in is expensive too.

On the internet shopping mall, I searched in order of highest price and looked in the middle but it was still about 10 grand.

It said it was from the 19th century from Italy or something like that in the description.

For someone trying to learn it for the first time, having a violin like this would be like putting pearls on a pig.

‘Ok, order.’

Well, who cares, I’m drowning in money.

As a complete newbie me, I went ahead and ordered the 1\$0,000 grand violin.

When I get good, I’ll buy the most expensive one.

I just went ahead and called the seller and asked for expedited delivery

“Yes, we can send it right away.”

As a buyer purchasing an expensive item, the seller was very compliant.

“As long as it’s a good product, I’ll order right away.”

“Well, if you do we’d be grateful. No need to worry about the product. If there is a defect in such a grand item, that would be a problem.”

Then that takes care of the violin, now back to surfing the web.

In the Bucheon area, I’m looking for a violin instructor.

There are rather a lot of specialists looking for jobs so it wasn’t hard.

-Hello?

It was a woman’s voice. Some name brand music school was listed in the blurb and her voice sounded about that age.

“You teach violin? I am calling in regards to your blog message.”

-Ah, yes!

“I am a complete noob, and I have a child from out of the country and she is pretty good.”

-Oh, does the child speak Korean?

“None at all. She can’t even say my name.”

The woman laughed.

-I understand. First, I’ll meet and see the level and then decide.

“Yes.”

-When should I come by?

“Immediately, today.”

-Excuse me? Oh, yes, what time today?

“Would 8 pm work?”

-Sure.

Hmm, rapid events indeed. Having money makes things this easy.

A few hours later, the delivery came by and dropped off the violin.

“Bella.”

Bella, who had been in her room excitedly playing the violin, ran out.

“Look at this.”

Bella’s eyes shined bright and she touched my violin.

She tried to lift it and put it under her chin but it was too big and she couldn’t get the grip right. Haha, even that is so cute.

But she persevered and managed to lift the bow too.

“How is it?”

I raised my thumb and asked. Bella nodded her head and raised her thumb the same way.

Hmm, seems good.

We fidgeted with the violin together and while Min-jeong prepared dinner for us.

Today was a feast too and I told Min-jeong.

“You must be tired. Make it simpler from now on.”

“I have the Korean food cooking certification skills exam so I am practicing for it. Once I get the certificate I’ll start cooking simpler meals.”

“I’m sure you’ll get it. You’re so good.”

“Hehe.”

At my compliant, Min-jeong put on a bashful expression. What, why is she like this. Not cocky like before.

We ate and then watched some TV and at 8 pm, the tutor I called arrived.

“Ah, hello.”

“Please, come in.”

Min-jeong greeted the music tutor.

Min-jeong glanced at me with narrow open eyes. Here it is again, that blocking instinct.

But the music tutor was a noticeably beautiful woman, so she's right.

With long straight hair like Min-jeong's was before she cut it, with clear features, it all made for an innocent looking face.

"Rest easy. I'll go bring some snacks, [yubo](#)."

(TN: An endearing way of calling someone 'honey'. Usually only used by married couples though. Pronounced yoh bo.)

At Min-jeong's words, I flinched and nodded my head.

"Uh, okay, do that, yubo."

"Your wife is a beauty."

"Isn't she?"

"She is very young."

"Yes, she looks young for her age."

But really, she is young. She is only in her early 20's.

Min-jeong probably has her ears raised in the kitchen and was listening to this conversation.

I introduced Bella and then started the lesson.

“You must start from reading music.”

“Yes.”

“And Bella is about a Suzuki level 2.”

“What is a Suzuki?”

After listening to the explanation, it is the most famous 10 book violin instruction. I wonder if it is easy to level 3 and then incredibly difficult henceforth?

It is such a popular teaching material that it is also used among amateurs to discern talent amongst them.

I learned to read the music.

Bella, who had been listening on the side, followed like a parrot to the teacher. It suddenly became a simultaneous Korean lesson.

I was hard at work taking notes as I went along and Min-jeong

brought us snacks and with lynx-eyes looked at the teacher and me.

Like that, the 2-hour lesson was over.

“How many lessons would you like a week?”

Asked the teacher.

“Is every day possible?”

“Um, every day?”

“Yes, I will pay handsomely.”

The teacher consented.

Now that I had learned how to read the music, it was full on and the fun violin learning began.

The violin is a disgustingly difficult instrument. Even just making the sound isn't easy. But still, the teacher was surprised.

“How did you learn so fast?”

“Is this fast?”

Having practiced a week and it being a feat to make one good sound, it made me dubious.

“You are very quick. The reason office workers attempt the violin as a hobby and give up is because of the time it takes to make the proper sound.”

Is that so?

What a cursed instrument.

I now realized how great violinists are.

“Bella is incredible.”

I mumble while looking at Bella, who was playing with ease by my side.

Bella opened her eyes wide and I gave her a thumbs up to say that she's the best.

Bella gave a big smile.

“Ugh, so cute.”

“She is.”

The teacher was smitten too.

With two flames of life being given to her every day, Bella has become energetic and her violin skill made daily progress.

Even an amateur like me could see the daily progress.

It was as if the skill that was suppressed because her disease is now in full bloom.

Bella, with joy that her fingers are moving as she wants now, excitedly played the violin.

2 weeks passed by like this.

I asked Sylph for noise reduction and practiced the violin like crazy on the terrace.

‘If someone sees, they’ll think I’m crazy.’

For real though, sometimes Min-jeong looked at me with eyes like that.

But this is training.

More so than training with martial arts, raising the reflex skill level is the profit.

Reflex.

The ability to move the body at will.

In some ways, it can be said that it is the most fundamental martial art.

The violin is the fastest training method to raising that skill level.

‘It will definitely work.’

Intermediate level 1 reflex was being used, which is why my violin skill was improving so much faster than the average person.

So that is why I must practice the violin as hard as I can, so I can raise my reflex level.

I did a lot of drastic exercises in the elf village. But timing every finger correctly, delicately moving, that kind of movement is a first for me and it makes it a very high difficulty level training.

“Oh, oppa, aren’t you going to work?”

“Yea, I don’t have to work.”

“You’re going to become a violinist?”

“No, this is a hobby.”

“What hobby are you doing like you’re possessed?”

“Because it’s fun.”

Min-jeong worried about me, playing the violin all day like an unemployed man.

But there were results.

2 weeks later, I played the last gavotte in the Suzuki book 1.

“How in the world...”

The teacher looked like she couldn’t believe it.

Bella, with a face full of surprise, also started clapping.

“Am I a fast learner?”

“Too fast! Mr. Hyun-ho, you are a genius, a genius! Why did you

not take up music to begin with?”

“Uh, not sure.”

At the teacher’s strong reaction, it makes me feel shy.

I moved right onto Suzuki book 2’s first piece, Judas Maccabeus.

A crazy learning speed.

“Huanag!”

Bella exploded into tears. She collapsed to the floor and kicked her legs and cried.

Odin made a bitter smile.

Today is December 31.

It was the day Bella goes back to Denmark.

Her father Odin came to get her personally, and Bella was crying saying she doesn’t want to go. She has grown quite attached to us during that time.

While Min-jeong soothed Bella, Odin came out with me to the terrace and we had a conversation with just the two of us.

It is because no one can hear us speak in the Arena language.

“It has been a long time since I’ve seen Bella sob like that.”

“She’s grown very attached. I’m upset about it too.”

“I am glad.”

“Huh?”

“Even as she cries and resists and tantrums, I can tell Bella’s health has improved quite a bit. I can tell in one glance that she has gotten much better.”

“Hahaha...”

“Thank you very much.”

Odin held my hands tight.

“I think she has gotten much better but I don’t know that it will heal her disease.”

“I will observe the results and if needed, I may request your

assistance once more.”

“Please do.”

“Then next time, I shall see you in the Arena.”

“Yes.”

We went with them to the Incheon airport to see Odin and Bella off.

Before Bella left, she stayed in Min-jeong’s arms and sobbed. A cute little girl, miserably crying, it made our eyes naturally water too.

On our way home, Min-jeong said.

“Wasn’t Bella so cute?”

“Yep.”

“Hing, I want a daughter like that too.”

“... shall I give you one?”

Min-jeong chuckled aloud at my bad joke.

Thankfully, that talk ended there.

Somehow, I feel that bit by bit that Min-jeong was wanting to get married and it made me nervous.

Right now, I don't have the capacity to think of things like that.

I don't know when I will die and I don't want to leave a family behind.

We spent the new year together and in the middle of January, Min-jeong started going to work at her cousin's company in the Gasan digital district.

The days of leisurely sticking together and playing have ended.

“Darn, the good days have gone.”

“To eat and live, you have to work.”

“Hmph, oppa, you can be responsible for me.”

“Now now, one must be responsible for one's own life.”

“Hmph.”

With a slightly disappointed face, Min-jeong left for work.

Dear girl, even as a joke, if I say I'll take care of you, the atmosphere will somehow start feeling like we need to get married. That won't do.

Being alone, the training became easier. I did the training I was unable to do because Min-jeong might have seen.

“Teleport.”

Pat!

In an instant, I felt my body lift and I was suddenly standing in front of the mu ren zhuang.

“Weapon Neilson H2, Divine Protection of the Wind.”

I held the dual pistols in both hands and the Divine Protection of the Wind activated.

I lightly took a step and quickly moved from left to right and hit the mu ren zhuang.

Dodging between the stick arms while twisting my hands to

target the mu ren zhuang. I repeated these movements like a machine.

Jumping using and using the wind, I instantly increased the distance. I leapt again and shortened the distance and aimed again.

In the time it took to blink, I flew to the opposite side and kicked the sandbag while aiming the dual pistols at the mu ren zhuang at the same time.

While pouring sweat, I finished the training and afterwards, I practiced the violin. I got rid of the sound with Sylph and repeatedly played the pieces I had learned thus far.

The playing of a violin was not easy so even a bit carelessness while practicing is very obvious.

I'm already doing it so I look at the next piece I'll be learning.

And then.

-Reflex (synthesis skill): know how to move your body well.

*Intermediate level 2: In all actions requiring body movement, possess prodigious abilities.

“Yes!”

I lifted the violin and bow and shouted out.

Yes, the reflex skill level was raised.

A fairly high level intermediate level 1, I raised it in a month so it's a pretty impressive result.

Playing tag with the elves and fighting zombies on the cliffside, I went from entry level 5 to intermediate level 1 and that took a long time.

‘It seems a new training that I’ve never done before will be of more aid.’

When I get good at the violin, I thought I’ll pick up another instrument.

Chapter 81 – Back To The Arena (Part 1)

The 60-day rest period went by smoothly.

Living with Min-jeong went by without a problem.

Min-jeong, busy with work, still always made me delicious food, and on days that we were too tired, we ate out.

I, of course, stayed at home and used Sylph to make the house spotless so we didn't have any issues with each other.

I actually had Sylph memorize the original placement of every item in the house. That made organizing incredibly easy. Even if I made a real mess, Sylph could use her wind once and she could clean it up instantly.

My family was well too.

Noona, who works at a big law firm, needed not be mentioned at all of course, and mom continued to sell her fried chicken well.

Nowadays, mom has been thinking of retiring and wants Hyun-ji to take over, and was in a hurry to do so.

Even with so much money, there's no place for me to put it for family.

If my family was poor, I could have splashed out the money and saved the family.

The only problem our family has is Hyun-ji.

-Son, son, talk some sense into Hyun-ji.

“What about Hyun-ji?”

-She said she wants to move out.

“Move out?”

-She said there's lots of business in Seoul and said she wants to move there.

It is not a completely unfounded excuse.

“Maybe she's feeling the pressure now that she's graduated and officially started the unemployed life.”

-Why should I treat her like a queen if she's unemployed?

“So, what did you tell her?”

-I told her to move out with her own money. And Hyun-ju put her foot down and said she won't help.

Even though I wasn't there, I'm sure Hyun-ji threw a tantrum and insisted. The heartless mother-daughter combo probably didn't flinch.

"Isn't that a bit too harsh to Hyun-ji? At least she's thinking of getting a job."

-She just thinks it. You know her well enough too. It's the kids that don't study well that say they're going to study. They just don't actually do it."

I know it well.

The bundegi bastard said it was because I had never known starvation.

-Anyway, Hyun-ji might nag you about it so beware.

"Got it."

As soon as that call ended, a text came.

It's Hyun-ji.

[Hyun-ji: Oppa, are you home?]

[Me: yeah]

[Hyun-ji: Ok]

‘Ok to what.’

I felt a slight worry.

Finally, I get a call from Hyun-ji, and it’s a video call.

“Hello?”

-Oppa~!

“What, it’s that voice you use when you want something.”

-Hing, oppa!

It sounded similar to Min-jeong.

That’s why it annoyed me even more.

“What do you want.”

-Oppa, turn in a circle with your phone.

“What are you saying?”

-So I can see what kind of house you live in.

I flinched at that.

Clever girl.

So that was why she first asked through text if I was home.

The fact that I live in a luxurious penthouse is a secret that only Min-jeong knew.

-Hurry up and show me. Hehe, oppa, you have lots of money so you aren't living in a crowded studio. And all the while you were prepping for the entrance exams, you were in that basement studio so you probably shudder at the thought of them.

For an idiot, she's quite sharp in this area. What useless insight.

-Hurry up and show me.

“I don't want to.”

-Why not?

-I'm shy.

I said with slight aegyo.

-Don't BS me.

At my aegyo, Hyun-ji's expression turned icy.

-Oppa, I know you live with Min-jeong.

“Say what?”

-Min-jeong told me everything.

... Yoo Min-jeong!

Hyun-ji made a sweet grin.

-Every time I asked her what she's doing she said she was out grocery shopping. Would she shop so much if she was living alone? She's being all like a newlywed wife. Can't trick me.

“For an idiot... “

“Hey, don't call me an idiot! Anyway, are you really going to say you live with Min-jeong in a tiny studio? I felt it last time when we went to Europe, but I think oppa, you have a lot more money than

I think you do.

I couldn't help but shudder at Hyun-ji's incredible insight.

“I can't show you my home.”

-Hmph, really? I guess I'll just have to torture Min-jeong.

“Don't you bother Min-jeong! I'm going to tell her to keep her lips sealed well.”

-Puahaha, lips sealed, Min-jeong?

Hyun-ji laughed like she had just experienced a hilarious comedy.

-She might not seem like it but you know she's actually a huge pushover? If I work her even a bit, she'll tell me everything.

“Kuk...”

-Let's see, how much I've made her tell me, that lately her hips are sore...

“Ok, stop. Let us not cross the conversational barrier as siblings.”

-If she said she can't even keep her head straight, oppa, you must be a genius!

“Ku akkk-!!”

-Hehehe!

Hyun-ji’s wicked laughter bothered my ears.

Just how far did you push Min-jeong for her to tell you! She’s my little sister but she really is a dangerous woman.

“What is it you want?”

Then Hyun-ji, who has been confident up until now, changed her tone.

-Oppa! Seriously, help me!

“Move out?”

-Yeah! I want to go up and live in Seoul on my own!

“You living alone without anyone to keep you in check, just picturing it is scary.”

-Hing, I really am going to try hard. Even now, I’m trying to get a job and I’m applying here and there.

“Then do it.”

-Give me some money.

“Get lost please.”

-Ang, oppa!

“Don’t nag me.”

-Help me out, I’m your only baby sister!

“If it’s like this with one, I wonder how bad two would’ve been.”

-Seriously! Help me out.

It is a video call and it made it all the more annoying. The tantrum throwing and nagging Hyun-ji, I have to see it with my eyes.

“I heard mom and noona said no too? Then what does that make me look like if I help you?”

-Those two are trying to get me to fry chicken!

“Do it, fry chicken. At your level, there aren’t a lot of ways to make it big.”

-Isn't it too much to cut off all my other options and make it so that that's all I can do? I need to be given a chance!

"All this time, did you not have enough chances? Even your college grades are only a 2.0, right?"

-I'm going to change from now on. Please give me one chance, huh?

Ah, Hyun-ji really lays on the sophistry.

Oddly, I see where she's coming from and had nothing to say in response.

"I'll think about it and decide."

-... okay.

I finished the call and let out a sigh of relief. Trying to converse with Hyun-ji when she wants something is a tiresome thing.

That night, having come back from her first day at work, Min-jeong went to a welcome party and came home late.

As soon as she came home she ran to me and immediately kowtowed.

“Oppa, I made a mistake.”

She must have heard from Hyun-ji.

“Do you know you’ve done wrong?”

“Yes.”

With such a pitiful expression, I couldn’t say anything to her.

“Why are you so weak with Hyun-ji.”

“It’s not that I’m weak...”

So goes Min-jeong’s story.

Originally, her and Hyun-ji and Ji-hyun, no matter where they went they stuck together, the trio. She said something like their hobby was divulging each other’s secrets?

If you have something you wish to keep secret, the other two friends will make you spill no matter what.

“That’s why we don’t have secrets from each other and that’s why we are so close.”

“Yeah, I got that. Hyun-ji called me a genius.”

“Kyak! I’m sorry! Ji-hyun started saying something about what it’s like at nighttime... ang!”

Min-jeong grabbed her head in misery.

Just like that, the time for repentance was over and Min-jeong suddenly said.

“But oppa, what are you going to do about helping Hyun-ji gain her independence?”

“You’ve been had by Hyun-ji again.”

“Hehe, yes.”

That Hyun-ji, seriously.

“If she comes up to Seoul and has no one to keep her in check, she’s bound to go crazy, how could I let her?”

“She won’t, oppa.”

“I know her well.”

“You and me both are going to work, and Hyun-ji is hard at work

looking for a job. With us two working, you think she'll go out by herself? Even if it's for us, she's going to try hard.”

That makes sense too.

But I got the feeling this too was because Hyun-ji made her rehearse it.

After thinking about it a little for, I decided and sent a text to Hyun-ji.

[Me: Hey]

[Hyun-ji: Yes, dear brother!]

[Me: -_-;; I have a studio, you can use that]

[Hyun-ji: Really? YES!!]

[Hyun-ji: But just a studio?]

[Me: You should just bury your bones in Cheonan]*

(TN: He's saying to just stay and die in Cheonan since the studio isn't good enough for her.)

[Hyun-ji: No, no, thank you for the studio! Arigato!]

[Me: I will give you one check card so use that for living expenses and I'm going to check everything you use it for so if you use it for something else or make a withdrawal, that instant, you're done]

[Hyun-ji: Hmph, got it]

[Me: For now, we'll see how it goes for half a year, until June. If you make no progress by then, you are the Cheonan chicken fryer, ok?]

[Hyun-ji: ok, ok, I love you ♥]

[Me: shut up]

Then Min-jeong got a text. Min-jeong laughed and showed it to me.

[Hyun-ji: [good job, my girl](#)]

(TN: This was written in English.)

What a fuss. Goodness.

I don't know if this is a good thing and just sighed.

By tomorrow, mom and noona will have heard this news and will say something.

“I’m just going to say this, but we can never invite Hyun-ji to our place.”

“Yes.”

“You promise?”

“Aww, I got it.”

Again, again, with the aegyo in her voice, this habit, I’m sure she learned it from Hyun-ji. Or Hyun-ji picked it up from Min-jeong.

Like that, 60 days passed.

The time, for the exam, I got plenty of the .357 magnum bullets and 7.62 bullets and stuffed them into the spatial storage space.

The spatial storage space is up to entry level 4 and the space has grown considerably. Even with plenty of bullets, there was space left.

Just in case I get bored, I put in the violin and music books.

‘Time to go.’

I texted Min-jeong and lie and said I have to go on a business trip. Then I went to a nearby hotel.

If I do die during the exam, Min-jeong will wake up with me dead right next to her. I don't want to give her that kind of trauma.

I think maybe and decide to leave a last will on my smartphone for my family and Min-jeong.

‘Done.’

The preparations are done.

I don't want to anxiously wait for the time to go by until the exam time is here.

“Hello and welcome.”

I'm so sick of seeing this baby angel, and he greets me.

“Board retrieval.”

Familiarly, I summon my board and check the exam.

-Name: Kim Hyun-ho

-Class: 16

-Karma: 0

-Mission: protect the brown mountain elves

-Time limit: 12 months

My face completely crumples.

“A year, again!”

“That’s right.”

“Isn’t this too much?”

“You must know that there are examinees with far longer exams.”

I recall Neilson Aslan and I shut my mouth. I am definitely better off than him.

“Doesn’t a longer exam give you a good opportunity to grow?”

“I don’t get the feeling this time will be safe like last time?”

“You’ve had it easy twice so now it’s time to pay the price.”

Protect the elves.

From who?

‘The enemy was the undead.’

The Bastian enemy from the north will fall by Odin’s army’s war.

The silver clan to the east isn’t really a danger to the elves.

The leader, Leon Silver, is rather intelligent and strengthened the clan but I am sure they do not recognize their inferiority.

Then the only enemy left is the zombies climbing up the cliff.

‘Then all the things that have unfolded thus far can only point to the black wizard that is moving the undead.’

The overall flow of the exams, I have thought of it, and something came to mind so I asked the baby angel.

“What do I have to do to block the undead?”

“I’m not sure?”

“It’s the Tree of Life, isn’t it?”

“I’m not sure.”

“The Tree of Life is the center of this exam, isn’t it? That’s why the last ones, the 4th and 5th turn, were about saving the Tree of Life. Aren’t I correct?”

“I’m not sure?”

I stared straight at the baby angel.

The baby angel, like always, was just jolly.

It was like always, impossible to tell what the angel is thinking by judging his expression.

Then again, it’s not a human, but an angel.

But I think I’m right.

Chapter 82 – Back To The Arena (Part 2)

I passed through the exam door and I appeared at the top of the Tree of Life.

The great top that felt like it touches the sky, the Tree of Life, seeing it, I felt a sense of welcome familiarity. It's been 60 days.

It was only early dawn and the village was quiet.

It was peaceful.

Why are the humans in such angst to harm these peacefully living elves?

‘I'm sure it's because there is something to be gained from it.’

The opponents are the undead.

The dead ones have been revived not as the living nor the dead, being controlled by a dark magician using his evil magic.

Odin said that dark magic was derived from trying to figure out the secrets of immortality but was now considered a forbidden art.

Death, resurrection, immortality, life.

When I connected those keywords to the elves, naturally what came to mind was the Tree of Life.

The elves have a dim sense of it. There was that time Derrick mentioned the undead coming for the Tree of Life.

He said that because the zombies are instinctively drawn to life, that they are immensely attracted to the Tree of Life, which has the greatest life force.

But the dark magician who controls those zombies probably have their eyes on the Tree of Life for another reason.

Probably for resurrection or immortality, a goal related to that.

“You are up early.”

I suddenly heard someone behind me.

The middle-aged elf warrior.

It was Derrick.

“Sir Derrick!”

“Why are you so excited to see me?”

“I’m just happy to see you.”

It has been 60 days since I last saw you.

“Huh. Anyway, since you are awake now, let’s get an early start today.”

“Do you always wake up at this time?”

“I do.”

“Then I will also wake up at this time!”

“Do as you wish.”

Derrick and I headed off together.

The purpose of today, just like before, was to look after the small Tree of Life. And to also fight the cliff-climbing zombies.

Running alongside Derrick, I felt a small sense of accomplishment.

After clearing the 5th exam, with the karma I earned, I increased the limit of my physical strength buff.

Intermediate level 5.

That was the limit of how high I could get without having mastered the aura control.

And the intermediate level 5 effect was the limit of an elf's physique.

Thus, compared to the best elf warrior Derrick, I am not falling behind at all.

Of course, that is only when speaking in terms of stamina.

“You are keeping up well.”

Even Derrick was amazed at my improved fitness.

“I have improved a lot lately.”

“But you have improved a lot from yesterday.”

“Have I?”

“Regardless, it is impressive.”

“Hehehe.”

“Then starting today, you will be able to properly run.”

“Excuse me?”

“Try to keep up.”

After that, Derrick shot off like a shot arrow.

“Huk!”

I was astonished.

I had been running at my full speed. But he is moving much faster than that, I couldn't believe it.

‘But haven't I reached the physical limit of the elves?’

How Derrick is running faster than me is the real question though.

Anyway, catching up was the first thing I have to do.

“Divine Protection of the Wind!”

Eventually, I run using the Divine Protection of the Wind and was able to keep up running alongside Derrick.

Lightly, lightly, every time I took a step, the wind that surrounded me helped to push my body forward.

Its nearly like taking a jump, but instead was a big stride. I ran with and was easily able to match Derrick's pace.

As I ran, I looked at Derrick.

'He doesn't look different in any way?'

His running posture is the same as before. I cannot, for the life of me, figure out what the difference was compared to me.

When we get to the small Tree of Life, I asked Derrick.

Derrick explained it to me.

"It is similar to how humans harness aura."

"It is aura control?"

"Yes. Humans apply aura to get stronger, like that, elves know how to use the power of nature. Spirit summons is also another way of using power of nature."

"So that is why the Tree of Life is precious to elves."

“That is right. In a place where the power of nature does not occur, our elves’ power greatly diminishes.”

Even if one could harness aura control, without aura, it is pointless.

Elves without the Tree of Life would be in that situation.

“When this tree is grown, everyone’s power will become stronger?”

“Yes. With two Trees of Life, we will have nothing to fear.”

In that case, the most important thing for me in the 6th exam will be to grow this tiny Tree of Life.

The 4th and 5th exams and now the 6th exam, this continuation, looking at the overall context, I can see the answer.

‘More so than fighting together with the elves, this may have the biggest effect.’

It doesn’t matter that I’ve gotten much stronger, amongst the stronger warrior elves, having me lend an extra hand in fighting, how much help could that be?

That is probably why even if I cleared the exam that way, I

probably won't get too much karma from it.

‘Yep, this is it. It was just like in the first exam, using your head more so than fighting will give out a higher prize.’

First, I created two flames of life and blew them into the small Tree of Life.

Eat lots and grow big.

The small Tree of Life, as if in a reply of thanks, shook a small twig. I'm sure it was from the wind though.

Then I look happily at Derrick.

“Kim, you are the greatest gift given to us from mother nature.”

“Huk!”

“Huh? Why are you being like that?”

“Uh, nothing. I am just so moved.”

Derrick smiled.

Whew, I almost fell in love with him just now. He says such things that target my heart! Derrick, you devilish elf!

“Now, if it is all done, let’s go.”

“Yes.”

We headed towards the cliff.

Atop the cliff, other older elves are already waiting. This place, in shifts for 24 hours a day, is always guarded.

“Hey, Kim!”

“Let’s do good again today.”

“You’ve improved greatly lately.”

Now, I was friendly with everyone and everyone said a thing or two with a sense of friendliness.

Good, today I will show everyone my improved skills.

I raised the Divine Protection of the Wind to entry level 5, and thanks to practicing the violin, my reflex skill was intermediate level 2.

‘The time limit is 12 months. Thus, protecting the elves for 12 months will clear the mission.’

A long period of 12 months, I can't recklessly use my bullets.

Of course, my spacial storage space was raised to entry level 4 and thanks to that, the virtual space has enlarged and the magnum bullets for the guns are stacked high inside.

But with the endless number of zombie hordes attacking every day for 12 months, those bullets won't be enough.

'I should save the dual guns unless a really important fight breaks out.'

Then, I began to fight.

"Kuah!"

"Uhak!"

"Uhahh!"

The corpses shouted as they clambered up the cliffside.

"I'll go first."

Derrick started.

Going straight down towards the zombies, pulling out his dual swords.

At the first moment of contact, he swung around both swords simultaneously.

Chwa Chwak-!

“Kuhak!”

“Kuah!”

With their arms or legs or head cut off, the zombies fell down.

Derrick stepped on zombies that were climbing up and slowed his own descent. The zombies that had become his stepping stones fell down too.

Slowing himself by stepping on the falling zombies, in that time, Derrick continually swung his swords with unsurpassed skill.

Seeing Derrick in action for the first time in 60 days, my mouth dropped open and I couldn't help but be amazed.

‘How high does my reflex skill need to be do be able to copy that?’

Probably the advanced level at least?

“I will go next.”

I stepped up.

“Oh, you, Kim?”

“I’ll watch this!”

“Good luck.”

The older elves encouraged me.

I smiled and used the Divine Protection of the Wind and ran towards the zombies.

With both feet aimed below, I gained my balance with both arms and landed properly.

The second I landed within the zombie group, I used all my strength and kicked beneath me.

It’s a dropkick using even the speed of my landing.

Kuang-!

An incredible wind pressure was expelled from around me. Because the Divine Protection of the Wind level has increased, its strength has definitely gotten stronger.

The small typhoon that began in my feet, swept the zombies.

“Kuruu!”

“Uack!”

“Kuack!”

A group of eight zombies got swept up and flew off together.

With one hand, I grabbed a crevice and, while hanging, I continued to kick.

Each time, the force that came out dropped two or three zombies.

I was dropping zombies like a duster drops dust.

“Oh!”

“Incredible!”

“That was a great kick!”

The praises shot out from the elves above the cliff.

I got excited and as I stepped on zombies again, I traversed across the cliff.

The zombies became my stepping stones and fell in droves.

Of course, I cannot yet maneuver the landscape like Derrick and have to grab the cliff with my hand.

Actually, isn't it the abnormal to move about freely on a cliffside with two feet!

Other elves joined the fray and the zombies got swept as if by a broom.

After fighting a long while, the zombie horde finally halted the attack.

“Whew, finally it's done.”

“Today in particular I felt like there were a lot more undead, is it just a feeling?”

“It is not just a feeling. I felt that too.”

The elves exchanged conversation as they rested.

The fight was won but everyone's voices were still filled with worry.

Derrick must be thinking something as he was just staring down where the zombies fell from.

“What are you thinking?”

“I am thinking about the undead.”

“There were more than usual today?”

Derrick nodded his head.

“I don't know if this is just a coincidence.”

“I am sure it is not a coincidence.”

Derrick's gaze fixed upon me.

I spoke.

“I heard that the one controlling the undead is a dark magician.”

“I am sure it is.”

From his speech, it didn't sound like Derrick knew that much about dark magic.

“If the zombies have increased, it means the dark magician has sent more than the usual amount.”

“Indeed.”

“Think about it. Up to now, the dark magician has sent zombies to attack here every day. And each time, we repelled the attack.”

Derrick nodded his head.

I continued to speak.

“We are fighting with the zombies but the real enemy is the dark magician. Not simple zombies, but a thinking human.”

“Yes.”

“The magician kept attacking and kept failing, wouldn't a human then try a method different than usual?”

“...”

“Probably, the reason the magician attacked the same way repeatedly, it probably thought that at some point you would grow tired.”

“You mean to see the magician was waiting for us to exhaust ourselves?”

“Yes, but continuing that tedious fighting repeatedly, the dark magician lost its patience first. He realized that continuing like that would see no end.”

“... that thinking makes sense. Humans have shorter lifespans than us and an equally shorter lack of patience.”

“So, in order to change something, the numbers were increased today.”

At those words, Derrick’s face became grim and I said one more thing.

“But this is just my thinking.”

Because my thinking could be wrong.

But Derrick nodded his head.

“No, Kim, your words are right. Thinking that way fits the

situation.”

“Does it?”

“Then Kim, let me ask you one thing. What do you think we should do?”

“Excuse me? Wouldn’t that be something the mothers decide?”

“Yes, the ultimate decision will be made by them. What I want is an opinion that will aid in that decision. You are a human like this dark magician and having another human’s opinion would be helpful.”

‘Hmm.’

It is an opinion that will be delivered to the mothers too and I had to think hard about what I would say.

Chapter 83 - Odin's Ability (Part 1)

After thinking it through carefully, I spoke.

“First, our power should be concentrated here.”

“You want to enlist the young ones here?”

“Yes, the way I see it, I think that the greatest danger will occur here.”

It's a simple argument.

Baron Bastian is more than busy going to war with Odin, and the Silver Clan isn't much.

The problem area.

Here, this place where I am getting a bad feeling from, is where we have to strengthen our forces.

“The dark magician is increasing the troops so we should do the same here and increase our power.”

“We are plenty as of yet.”

“You mean yet?”

“ ... ”

“Of course, I am not doubting your skills, Derrick. But how about thinking about it like this?”

“What else?”

Derrick showed interest in my words.

“They concentrated here and attacked and kept on failing. Today, they increased in number and ultimately failed again.”

“They did.”

“Then what will the dark magician think? Won’t the dark magician then think to attack from a different point?”

“There is no other spot. If not this cliff, the other way is much longer.”

“That is the weak point.”

“What?”

“They will keep hitting us here and focus our attention here, and cut through an unguarded weak spot. If it were me, that is what I

would do.”

I continued to explain.

“Since the attack has failed anyway, don’t you think it would be used at least as a diversion? No matter how long the other path is.”

“Hmm!”

Derrick groaned out loud.

“Your words are right. I must return immediately to the village.”

It sounds like he is going to deliver my opinions to the mothers.

“I will go with you.”

“That would be good.”

We quickly headed back to the village.

Because the 30-minute cool time had ended, I was able to use the Divine Protection of the Wind and was able to keep up with Derrick’s full speed.

As the level goes up, the duration goes up and the cool time decreases.

I momentarily regretted it, having raised my teleportation skill instead of using that karma for investing more in the Divine Protection of the Wind.

‘No, there will come a day where the teleportation comes in handy.’

No matter, it’s a skill I raised for escaping danger.

As soon as we arrived at the village, Derrick and I headed for the mothers gathered under the Tree of Life.

The mothers were busy chatting away and their gazes gathered to us.

“Oh, honey!”

The eldest mother was extremely glad and ran towards us.

The woman ran towards her husband like an arrow and Derrick calmly answered by brushing her hair, nothing could be nicer to see.

Seeing this, I miss Min-jeong.

‘At the very least, they’ve been a couple for 200 years and their relationship is so good.’

Then again, a man like Derrick, that amount of love seems normal. I fall for him sometimes... hmm hmm! I took some deep breaths to calm down and cleanse my mind.

“Why have you come back so soon?”

“I have something to tell you.”

“Oh my, something just for me?”

“It would be good for everyone to hear it.”

“Oh goodness, while everyone is listening...”

Whatever she is imagining, the eldest mother is blushing.

Whatever she is thinking, it'll be less than that.

“The movements of the undead have become more and more suspicious.”

The eldest mother's facial expression changed to disappointment.

The other mothers that were anticipating a good show also had a stunned expression on their faces.

“As for the specifics, you can listen to Kim.”

Now everyone was looking at me.

I once again delivered the talk I told Derrick. This time, I was able to give a more organized explanation than before.

“For now, the most important problem is the undead from the southwest?”

“Yes.”

“For us, humans are scarier. Humans clearly tried to kidnap our children and, in an attempt to avoid being spotted, used sly means to achieve their goals.

“I understand. As a human myself, I am embarrassed for my kind.”

“I do not say such things to hear those kinds of words from you. We cannot, even in the slightest, let go of the surveillance to the north. There was that time Elise almost got taken as well.”

At that, I rolled the thoughts around my head once more.

I organized my thoughts and replied.

“About that, I have two things to say.”

“You may speak.”

“First, clearly the biggest and most dangerous problem the village is facing is due to the undead. But on that side, Derrick and many other heroic warriors are fighting there so we haven’t been afraid of it.”

“... ..”

“But you must have all been very shocked when Elise was nearly kidnapped. I understand. That lovable child, taken by shameless people, was nearly almost lost. “

From amongst the mothers came a sigh of lament and relief.

Thinking of that time must still sting. This is the mother elves’ strength and weakness.

“But because you have been influenced by that kind of psychological scar, I think perhaps the importance of matter has been incorrectly placed.”

Everyone was surprised and I continued to speak.

“For just a few small time human kidnappers, invading is not a

problem. Forbidding children from going off out of the village alone without adult permission, and even if there were a kidnapping, forming a chase team to get them back takes care of that.”

“Ah... ..!”

“But the undead are different. If the defense is broken and the Tree of Life is damaged, a disastrous situation, so bad I cannot even say aloud, will happen. So, what side is more important?”

The mothers instinctive love making them feel that every child is precious, because of it they couldn’t see the bigger problem.

“If kidnapped, we can rescue the child back...”

“I have never thought of that.”

“Shameless humans just putting a hand on our children was unbearably scary to think about.”

“A pursuit team, that is a good idea.”

“It’ll be taken care of to leave the children up to the women?”

The mothers started to stir and talk.

A little while later, the eldest mother spoke.

“Those were very good points. We will leave it to the women and organize a separate pursuit team.”

I commented.

“If a child under a women protector goes missing, immediately notifying the pursuit team system would be good to have.”

“Yes, of course! That is a good idea.”

And with those two pieces of advice, the children’s safety was recovered. Those that were guarding the north can be placed to the southwest with the undead.

The whole things went by without a hitch.

The mothers made their decisions and gathered everyone in the village, and notified them of these decisions.

“It is a good idea.”

“It’s Kim’s idea.”

“Kim is a genius. Figures.”

“So, I just take care of my siblings then?”

Everyone nodded and agreed that it was a good plan. My reputation ended up getting even better because of this.

The young men, especially, seem particularly pleased.

All this while, the southwest area had been guarded by the more adult men, and now they have the chance to join that.

Everyone wanted the chance to fight bravely for their village.

Thus, the southwest border was strengthened and blocking the undead became a lot easier.

Derrick enlisted the young elf men to a fighting unit patrol. In case by way of a different path, to detect undead infiltrating that way.

Because of the near palpable danger.

The elf children for the most part, did as they were told and played within the confines of the village.

Actually, now, the children lost interest of things beyond the village anymore. They were crazy about playing tag.

Every day, I put two flames of life into the small Tree of Life.

Then I went to fight the undead along the cliffside. In the afternoon I trained in games of tag and late at night before I went to bed, I practiced the violin.

I got rid of the violin's sound with Sylph's help and practiced quietly, unknown to anyone.

It was because I felt that if the elves showed an interest in the violin, it'll become bothersome for me. They may all want to try their hand at it. It seemed pretty obvious they would.

I ended up spending nearing a month doing this. A monotonous, but devoted, practice every single day.

“Humans-!”

A big noise came from the village.

That noise was delivered all the way to the cliffside where we were fighting the undead, and Derrick and I sprinted back to the village.

The atmosphere in the village was chaotic.

Of course, the male elves who have returned from patrol, the women too, were armed.

The children must all have been inside their homes, not a single one could be seen.

The group that appeared in the village was three humans, and what looked to be 10 emaciated elves.

Two older women, three males, and the others were five younger elves. All must have suffered, all their faces looked grim.

All three humans were armed but not wielding them.

And amongst them, was a very familiar face.

“Odin?”

At my familiarity, Odin looked towards me, surprised.

“Mr. Hyun-ho Kim?”

The elves looked at us and chattered.

“Do they know each other?”

“Kim seems to know him.”

“He’s good with Kim?”

“If he’s close to Kim, I guess he’s not an enemy.”

“Let’s see for now.”

The elves’ strong hostility loosened up a lot.

Haha, it was because I have gathered such good faith here.

Odin looked around at the elves, and then said to me.

“It looks like they trust you.”

“Yes, they do. But these elves that have come with you...”

Odin nodded his head.

“They were slaves. This is the number I was able to get by using all the funds I had available for it.”

Then, the mothers appeared. Next to the eldest mother stood Derrick, like a body guard.

The eldest mother asked me.

“Kim, do you know each other.”

“Yes, he is my friend. He is trust-worthy, do not worry.”

Odin walked forward and greeted the eldest mother.

“I am count Odin from Ulpenberg/Wolfenbourg.”

“What has brought you here? And those elves you have come with...”

The 10 elves saw the eldest mother and their faces froze up. I can only imagine what lives they must have had.

“I heard that my friend Kim Hyun-ho had made friends with the elves and has been living amongst you.”

“If you are Kim’s friend, I suppose you are not an enemy.”

“Yes. The elves that have come with me were living as slaves and I have rescued them.”

“Is what he is saying true?”

At the eldest mother’s question, the elves nodded.

“That human bought us.”

“He said he would take us to the brown mountain in the east.”

“He is a wonderful human.”

The older three women elves each had a say.

The eldest mother nodded.

“I cannot imagine how much you have all suffered. This place is safe, stay with us from now on.”

“Thank you.”

“Thank you very much.”

The elves that Odin brought, their eyes lit up.

Spending time with elves, I could feel how much they love nature.

Living as a human’s slave, I wonder how much they have suffered.

They probably didn’t task them with heavy labor but just being far removed from nature, humans could not know how miserable that is for them.

“We are very grateful for what you have done. But I am not sure what kind of benefit that deed was to you.”

At the eldest mother’s words, Odin replied.

“First, it was as a present to my dear friend Kim Hyun-ho who loves the elves, and secondly, I want to discuss the possibility of a treaty with you.”

Chapter 84 - Odin's Abilities (Part 2)

The mothers, first of all, took the 10 elves Odin has brought.

The young female elves took them away to their homes to rest and to give them food.

Odin and I went with the mothers to go to a quiet spot and have a conversation.

“First of all, using your own money to save our kind, we thank you once again for your kindness and goodwill.”

“Please do not mention it. As a human too, I am ashamed of such cruelty.”

“Did you say Count Odin of Ulpenburg? With a high position amongst the humans, I do not know the reason you would want a relationship with us when we are not affiliated at all. What benefit is that to you?”

“The world is becoming more and more chaotic, and protecting yourself on your own is becoming more difficult. I think the same can be said for you as well.”

“Yes.”

The eldest mother completely agreed.

Odin said.

“More so, we have a common enemy.”

“A common enemy?”

“It is Baron Bastian. I have just finished preparations to go to war against Baron Bastian.”

“Bastian is the human set up to the north of here.”

“Yes, he is.”

“You want our help in attacking him?”

Odin shook his head.

“Not so. I have no difficulty at all in dealing with Baron Bastian.”

“You do look the part.”

Derrick, who had been quiet, finally spoke.

“You are the strongest one of all the humans I have ever met.”

“That is an honor.

Odin smiled.

The mothers and I were surprised.

Derrick was the longest living elf on the brown mountain.

And he said he is the strongest human he has ever seen.

Odin is an incredible examinee that has cleared all 20 of his exams thus far. I cannot fathom just how strong he is.

“Then why is it you want our alliance?”

“It is because I want to work together to handle the future dangers we cannot yet see.”

Said Odin.

“Baron Bastian is not my match, but I do not know why he would fight me when he knows that. I think there is someone much bigger standing in the background.”

At those words, the mothers gathered and started discussing.

I too was deep in thought.

Let's think.

The current circumstances, the Silver clan lycanthropes and baron Bastian have made some kind of deal.

They probably see the elves as their joint target.

The ambitious Leon Silver is probably thinking of expanding his silver clan territory into the elves' brown mountain.

And Baron Bastian probably wants to capture all the elves and sell them as slaves and make a grand profit.

Then add the black magician who is controlling the undead, into this mix.

The Silver clan, baron Bastian, and the black magician, those three combined and attacking the elves, they can all get what they want that way.

‘That’s it.’

I organized my thoughts before I said.

“I have something I want to say.”

“Go ahead, Kim.”

“Yes, what Mr. Odin has said, the danger we don’t yet see, I think that is the black magician.”

“Black magician?”

“Yes, I am pretty sure I know what the silver clan and baron Bastian want from targeting the elves. The silver clan wants territory, baron Bastian wants elf slaves.”

“Cruel things.”

“Shameless have joined forces.”

The mothers were angry.

I continued to speak.

“The problem is what the black magician wants. And I think that’s the Tree of Life.”

“The Tree of Life?”

“Yes, I heard the evil spell that makes the undead came about from research from immortality. In that case, the Tree of Life that is full of life force, wouldn’t it make the best research specimen for

that?”

“It can be thought of that way, I see.”

Odin nodded his head and agreed.

I continued.

“There is something I would like to ask. Before I came, the Tree of Life was getting sick, when did that begin?”

“Why do you ask that?”

The eldest mothers asked.

“I want to know if the Tree of Life getting sick was due to natural causes or if the black magician put some sort of curse or something of that sort.”

“...!”

The mothers were all in shock.

“It wasn’t a natural decline, was it?”

“I thought so too. I think that’s why we never believed that it was dying.”

“It wasn’t a natural cause so of course we could not find the reason.”

“Kim’s deductions are right.”

The mothers were all chatting at the same time, it suddenly looked like a women’s association, and it flustered Odin.

“Is it always like this?”

“Yes, it’s always like this. You will have to get used to it.”

“It is a fun ruling system.”

“When you get used to it, it just makes you sigh.”

The agony of man having to watch the women chatter...

After a long while of chatter, a decision was made.

“Our decision is that if the three of them have joined forces, then we too will need an alliance. Count Odin of Ulpenburg, we will form an alliance with you.”

“It is a wise choice.”

Odin shook hands with the eldest mother.

So, the two decided to join forces and then Odin said.

“I have one request, could I see these undead? I want to see how dangerous the undead are.”

“Would you like to join us in the fight for one day?”

Asked Derrick.

Odin smiled and nodded his head.

“That sounds good. I haven’t had a good chance to practice my skills lately.”

I decided to go too.

It’s a chance for me to see how good Odin’s skills are.

Together, we headed for the southwest cliff.

“There sure are plenty of them.”

Those were Odin's thoughts on the horde of zombies ambling up the cliff.

"Have you always fought such numbers?"

"Recently, they have increased a lot."

Replied Derrick.

The elves that were guarding the cliff were very interested about this newly appeared Odin.

Everyone was curious about his abilities.

Perhaps he had caught on to that, Odin smiled and took out his sword from his hip sheath.

"I suppose it is time for my hazing."

"Whenever you are ready."

"Is it okay for the cliffside to break a little?"

At those words, I was completely surprised, and Derrick pointed with his chin to the other elves.

The elves receded from the cliffside.

“Go ahead.”

“I shall.”

Odin closed his eyes and seemed to focus himself on his sword.

Then... ..

Paaaat!

A blue halo from his sword, like a heat shimmer, started to swell.

“That, what is that?”

“He is focusing aura into the weapon.”

Replied Derrick.

“Is something like that possible?”

“That human can do more than that. Just watch.”

The blue heat shimmer coming from the sword eventually became a solid mass.

“Aura sword. It has been a long time since I have seen that.”

Said Derrick.

“Is an aura sword something incredible?”

“It is said that if your aura control skill is able to reach a dramatic extreme, that that is possible. I have only seen that once, a very long time ago. Amongst the humans that attacked us, there was one that could do that.”

As soon as Derrick finished talking, Odin jumped down the cliff.

Odin went straight down towards the zombies and swung his sword around.

The aura sword swung in their direction, with a wide berth.

That after effect was shocking.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwang – !!

The aura’s storm swept up the zombies.

The strength of the hit broke a line of rocks and created a rockslide. The landslide took more zombies with it.

So with a single blow, Odin easily took care of over hundreds of zombies.

‘Is that a human?’

I was astonished.

At that level, he’s practically a walking weapon. It is no different than if he were to be holding a missile on his belt instead of a sword!

“Whew, that was refreshing.”

Odin came atop the cliff with a refreshed face.

“That was incredible.”

“Thank you. Now, could I see your abilities?”

“I shall show you.”

Derrick pulled out both his swords.

I worried a little bit.

Derrick’s technique is indeed impressive but compared to the enormous power that Odin just showed us, the impact might look

shabby.

But that concern of mine was apparently needless.

“Kasa.”

Derrick summoned a spirit.

His Kasa was a grand fire giant.

A huge fire spirit, at 5 meters tall!

The commanding figure was ablaze, it was like a demon beast from revelations.

“A superior level spirit.”

Odin was shaking with excitement.

‘That’s a superior spirit?’

For a moment, I remembered my own Kasa.

A Kasa whose body has grown and is wagging its massive tail.

Kuk, no matter how much I think about it, it’s not as cool as

Derrick!

Derrick then showed us something even cooler.

The fire giant and Derrick combined into one body.

Kasa's flames seeped into Derrick's body, they were drawn inside, and disappeared.

Instead, hot flames started to spew from all over Derrick. From his breath, came fire.

Derrick jumped below to the cliff.

“Ku haaab!”

With a strong shout, he wielded his dual swords.

Kwa kwa kwang – kwa lu lu lung! Hwa lu lu luk – !

It made fireworks.

In all directions, hot flames abound. Are those waterfall flames?

Below the clifftop, flames flowed like a river.

“Kuahh!”

“Kulululu!”

“Kuaak!”

“Uhakkk!”

Zombies were melting. In an instant, hundreds of them become a heap of ashes and died.

After the firework celebration, there wasn't a single zombie left clinging to the cliff.

“My goodness...”

That is the power of spirit summons?

I thought of spirit summons and weapons as discrete and separate. And up to now I thought Derrick's skills were in his dual swords, not spirit summons.

But seeing the great impact of the dual swords and the spirit combined, I feel as if I have been introduced to a new world.

‘Am I able to combine the guns and spirit summons/’

I must.

I thought of the Mosin-Nagant and double guns as support tools, and the spirit summons as a useful skill for lots of situations.

I thought of them as different tools for different things.

But I realized that if I kept thinking that way, I could never become like Derrick.

Build a well for one of the two things or use both as one thing.

I chose the latter as my future path.

‘I’ve been thinking of the spirit summons too carelessly up to now. At least starting now, I should be experimenting with it more.’

I deemed that to be my task for this 6th turn exam.

“It’s been a while since I’ve seen your skills.”

When Derrick returned, he was flooded with compliments.

“That was great!”

“Definitely Derrick.”

Derrick just smiled at it.

These guys, everything up to now was just some exercise.

Now that I think of it, all this time fighting, no one had used their spirit summons. They haven't used their real skills.

“How was it?”

Derrick asks Odin.

“It's the first time I've ever seen something that great. There isn't that much known to the world about elves and spirit summons and it was hard to fathom.”

That was true.

Derrick, on his own within the hour, could turn the silver clan into a sea of fire.

But they don't know that which is why they were targeting the elves.

“But there is one weird thing, do this many undead attack every day this way?”

“Interestingly. They have increased lately.”

“But to waste that many undead every day, one would need a lot of corpses. And realistically speaking, that is impossible.”

When Odin said that, I wondered too.

Acquiring that number of corpses every day, there's no way something like that can be done secretly.

Chapter 85 - Exploration (Part 1)

‘That is definitely strange.’

You can’t get that many bodies every day. At the very least, it would be extremely difficult to do so in secret.

Odin then said.

“It probably isn’t a method of acquiring large amounts of corpses daily. In that case, news would have spread, and since black magic is banned, and every nation would take action against that.”

“Then?”

“Up to now, have you have fighting by dropping the climbing zombies?”

“Correct. No need to waste energy.”

“In that case, I can only make one logical conclusion.”

Said Odin.

“Reusing the dropped zombies over and over.”

“Reusing?”

Derrick and the elves, their expressions changed.

“The bottom of this cliff is so far down we cannot see it, when zombies are dropped from this height, wouldn’t they break into pieces at the bottom? Would broken pieces like that still be reusable?”

I asked.

Odin shrugged his shoulders.

“I am not sure. There is no way to know without checking it out. Regardless, getting that many corpses isn’t easy. Even if a whole country were to be moved, no one could do it secretly.”

“Then should we check...”

Mumbled Derrick as he looked below the cliff.

“If you are going to explore it, I would like to join you for that.”

Suggested Odin but Derrick shook his head.

“From now it is our business. There is no need to further trouble yourself.”

“Is that so. However, we are now allied so if you ever need aid, do not hesitate to ask.”

“I will do so.”

After returning to the village, Odin said his goodbyes.

“I must return now.”

“Going back already? Please stay a day before leaving.”

“I regret that I can’t but I cannot be away from my seat anymore. Even so, we are in the middle of war and I have to get back as fast as possible.”

Odin smiled and shook my hand.

“Anyway, thanks to you I had an exciting time. If it weren’t for you, Mr. Hyun-ho Kim, allying with the elves and seeing a superior level spirit summons, all of it would have been impossible.”

“Don’t mention it.”

Like that, Odin left with the two he came with.

I too was thankful towards Odin because he was able to broaden my knowledge through a special experience.

The Aura Master's Aura Sword.

The true power and use of superior spirit summons.

They are incredible levels that one day I must catch up to.

“Weapon, Neilson H2.”

Pat!

Two guns appeared in either hand.

I stared sincerely at my guns.

How can I use this with spirit summons?

The only useful method I can think of right now is to use Sylph and increase accuracy.

If Sylph who is a wind spirit can aid the aiming, no matter the distance I will have a 100% accuracy rate.

But even then, there is no change to the power. The gun is just a gun.

‘The magnum bullet is a pretty strong bullet, but looking at it now it seems so meek

Seeing Odin and Derrick’s efforts today, guns had become obsolete.

I think maybe it was a bad idea to pick guns as my weapons.

‘There is definitely a way.’

I hypothesized ways that Sylph and Kasa can be used for shooting.

‘Should I use Sylph to make the bullet fly faster?’

But that would use too much effort so it seems ineffective.

Changing the path of the going bullet already uses a lot of summons time as I found out through trial.

‘I have to use the least amount to increase the power the most.’

I think of the fundamentals of a gun.

Pulling the trigger and making the gunpowder ignite and explode, the gunpowder catches on fire and makes gas.

This gas quickly fills the space and with that pressure, the bullet is shot.

That gas pressure can also be used to pull back a breechblock and bolt carrier. The fundamentals of my semi-automatic Neilson H2 is like that.

Hold on?

The explosion and the gas pressure, couldn't Kasa control that?

“Kasa.”

-Hek hek hek!

Kasa hadn't been summoned in a while and wagged their tail back and forth.

“Listen carefully.”

I explained in general terms the principles of my gun and then gave the order.

“Do you think you can use your power to strengthen the gunpowder's explosion?”

-Mung! (Bark!)

Kasa nodded his head.

“And you can control the gas pressure that comes from the gunpowder explosion?”

This time too, Kasa kept nodding his head.

“Then combust the gunpowder in the chamber faster and the gas pressure, aside from the power needed for the breechblock and bolt carrier, focus the rest all on shooting the bullet. Do you understand what I’m saying?”

Basically, not losing even a bit of gas pressure and focusing it on ejecting the bullet.

Often as a culprit behind a broken gun is because the gun can’t take the gas pressure that occurs maybe is what I’m thinking.*

That is because the gas pressure isn’t entirely concentrated on the bullet but lost elsewhere.

Thus, by using Kasa, I can make the bullet more powerful and concurrently decrease durability loss in the guns.

‘Let’s try this.’

“Sylph.”

-Meow?

Sylph was summoned. Kasa and Sylph, once again, started fighting on to of my head fight for a spot.

“Get rid of all sound.”

-Meow!

Sylph nodded her head.

I aimed my gun towards the sky.

“Kasa, got it?”

-Mung, mung!

Kasa fiercely nodded his head.

I pulled the trigger.

Poo shook!

Thanks to Sylph’s noise barrier, the gunshot doesn’t ring out and instead all that could be heard was the clean sound of the air being

strongly split.

‘It’s a success.’

The recoil from the gun was much stronger than usual.

With this amount of recoil, I think the power is about twice as strong.

‘I can’t be satisfied with this much.’

This time, I considered how I will use Sylph too.

After thinking for a while, I got a hint from having Sylph also make our fires.

“Sylph, the instant the gunpowder explodes, can you add more oxygen and increase the explosive power?”

-Meow.

Sylph nodded her head.

‘Good!’

A shooting method using both spirits.

Even so, it only uses a small amount of effort.

“Both of you, let’s do that, ready?”

-Mung!

-Meow.

The two spirits answered competitively.

I shot once more into the air.

A recoil much stronger than the one just before.

The sound of a bullet sharply cutting the air emanated out!

It’s a success this time too.

‘I want to use this somewhere!’

I can’t wait for tomorrow to come.

The next day, out of the blue, Derrick said.

“I am exploring the bottom of the cliff.”

Deciding the very next day, even elf men are different from their female counterparts.

“No matter what, the goal is exploration, I will pick just 5 for the group.”

“Amongst those, one is definitely you, I will go too.”

“I as well.”

“I will go too.”

The older elves all had a say.

‘Actually, I want to go too.’

Everyone’s skills were distinguished, so it doesn’t seem like there’s room for me to squish in anywhere.

Up until now, I was confident in thinking that amongst them, my skills were decent, but I now realize it was a complete delusion.

Everyone has lived for a long time and probably has achieved the

best intermediate spirits or higher, and my spirits are just entry level 6.

I decided to quietly step away.

But then, Derrick asked me.

“Kim, will you go?”

“Huh? Would it be okay for me to?”

“It is not fighting, but exploring. It will be dangerous I’m sure but I am with you so there is not need to worry.”

“There are others here, is there a reason I should especially be included?”

“I think we also need the point of view of a human, not just the perspective of an elf. Not only that, Kim, but you are wise and that will no doubt be of use in the exploration.”

Whoa, he called me wise. I want mom and noona to hear this.

“In that case, I would like to join. I will try my best not to be a hindrance.”

“You do not have to worry about that. Your skills have improved

drastically.”

Ah, I got a compliment from Derrick-nim!

I felt like my heart was flutter. After yesterday, I looked up to Derrick even more.

Including Derrick and I, a 5 person group was decided.

“Cob, could you summon Sylph please.”

“Okay.”

A veteran elf warrior named Cob, about the same age as Derrick, summoned Sylph.

His Sylph is round life form with large wings.

It is a round ball about the size of my face but its wings were big enough to envelop me and then much more.

A peculiar Sylph.

Looking at its size and presence, I think perhaps it is an intermediate spirit.

It definitely looks more incredible than my Sylph, but not as

much as Derrick's fire giant. Then intermediate it is.

"Let's go!"

Derrick jumped down first.

All of us jump down one by one in a line. If someone saw, it would probably look like a group suicide.

To get less resistance from the wind, I gathered my arms and folded my body small as best I can.

We built momentum and then kept falling faster and faster.

'This is thrilling!'

The pressure from the air around my entire body is vividly waking my senses. No roller coaster could give this kind of ecstasy.

But then, in the middle of this group fall, Derrick must have discovered something because he flicked his fingers.

Instantly, Cob's Sylph flapped its wings wide.

The wall of wind spread out instantly and caught our bodies.

We halted in midair.

“That.”

Derrick pointed to something.

What that was was a giant spider web. Not only was it extreme in size but the thickness was thick like wool.

“A spider web?”

I mumbled.

Derrick spoke.

“It is Arachne’s web.”

“Oh, that...!”

I looked at the glove I have on my hand. This Arachne glove I was gifted from Odin is made of that material.

“There must be Arachne here as well.”

“Was it originally an Arachne’s habitat that got swept up by the undead?”

“Probably so. Beneath the clifftop was originally the Arachnes’ territory is what I have heard. Although we can’t be sure because it’s not in our territory and we haven’t been before.”

“I have heard that from my father too. It was such a long time ago that I had forgotten.”

The four elves exchanged dialogue.

Then I said.

“Can I go close and inspect it?”

“Sure.”

Cob had Sylph move me closer to the web.

I extended my hand to the cliff wall and strongly grabbed a rock edge that was jutting out.

Uh du duk!

It was a rock with a crack already in it and with my strength, part of it crumbled.

I took the broken rock piece and threw it at the web.

Chul lung!

Surprisingly, the rock bounced right off of the web.

“What?”

“What is that?”

The elves were surprised.

A normal web should have caused the rock to stick to it.

The rock piece should have been stuck in the web or the web wouldn't be able to take the weight and would have ripped.

But this web didn't do that.

Someone had changed its properties and had gotten rid of the viscosity of the web.

“Looks like work of the black magician.”

“That is?”

“Yes, is someone hadn't taken an action to the web, there is no way that the viscosity would have disappeared.”

“That is true.”

Derrick agreed with what I said.

“And this verifies it, but you said below is the Arachne territory?”

“Yes.”

“But we’ve never seen it ourselves.”

Replied the elves.

From that, I was able to make my conclusion.

“I think that the Arachne that used to live here have gone over to the black magician’s side.”

Chapter 86 - Exploration (Part 2)

“If the magician has the undead Arachne, they would be far stronger than the zombies made from human corpses, why has the magician not used them yet?”

Asked Derrick.

I said.

“It means that side hasn’t shown us their power yet. And that the magician has used the Arachne for a different purpose.”

“A different purpose?”

I pointed to the web.

“Why do you think the magician put a non-viscous web here?”

“... I am not sure on that.

“It is to reuse.”

At my words, Derrick’s eyes grew wide. I continued speaking.

“The magician put up all these webs everywhere to safely catch the falling zombies. So that the bodies can be safely preserved and

used to attack again.”

“... Let us check it out for now.”

At Derrick’s words, Cob has Sylph remove the wind barrier.

We started falling once again.

My hypothesis was correct.

There were webs all along the cliff wall.

There were lots of ripped web, but those were probably from Odin’s efforts yesterday.

“Damn it.”

Very unlike himself, Derrick swears.

Rightly so.

Up until now, they had fought thinking they were dropping zombies to the floor, but because of that the zombie horde was able to keep attacking.

“We should have explored the cliff from the beginning.”

“Yes. If we had seen this sooner, we could have come up with a plan.”

“Damn it. We have been wasting our time all this time. We should have sliced them up into pieces as they climbed up.”

The elves were full of self-blame and sighed.

I gave them some encouragement.

“I don’t think that is true. Because the zombies weren’t used up, the black magician kept using the same attack method.”

Everyone looked at me with odd faces.

“In the time that bought us, I revived the Tree of Life and was able to grow the small Tree of Life. It was a big benefit to us.”

“... I see. Time was on our side.”

“Yes.”

“That makes sense. Thanks to getting two trees of life, we have gotten stronger.”

“Ho, thinking that way, it really wasn’t a waste?”

“That’s Kim for you.”

“Using a point we haven’t thought of and understanding the situation differently.”

Cob and the other veteran elves shower me with compliments.

I felt embarrassed and didn’t know what to do with myself but it felt good.

Because it really is awesome being acknowledged by someone.

We continued falling.

I wondered how much time has passed.

“Get ready.”

We each readied our weapons.

‘This is a good opportunity to check out what I tested yesterday.’

I was excited for it.

A while later, we reached the ground. The height of the fall really

was quite immense.

“Ku ahhh!”

“Ku rururu!”

It was swarming with zombies. Crawling with undead made from human corpses.

“There are no Arachne.”

Said Derrick.

I spoke up.

“It means the zombies made from human corpses are just expendable. Don’t you think the black magician has already left here?”

“Has the magician already left?”

“Yes, look. Aren’t there actually way less zombies compared to what we were thinking there would be? Yesterday, thanks to the two of you obliterating the zombies to the point of not even having a shape anymore, the numbers have been greatly reduced. Because of that, the black magician probably thought it wasn’t possible to continue and has left.”

“Hmm, that is reasonable thinking. Then leaving these zombies here...”

“The magician probably wants to throw us off to the last minute. If there was nothing here when we came down here, we would have known that the attack would be coming somewhere else, and caught on to that right away.”

Then, Cob yelled.

“There is a cave there.”

Everyone looked over to the direction Cob was pointing to.

Really, towards the inner gorge, there was a cave.

“We should check that out.”

“Hold on.”

I stopped Derrick.

“What is it?”

“That cave, aside from that, could there be another opening into it from different side?”

“I am not sure.”

“If that is the case, there is no need for us to check it out. In anticipation of us going in, there is a high chance there is a trap set up there.”

“Kim is right. I will have Sylph go look inside.”

Cob stepped forward.

Derrick nodded his head.

“That sounds good.”

Cob’s Sylph headed into the cave. For now, we were hanging on the cliff and awaiting the scouting results.

Then Sylph returned.

Cob and Sylph must have some kind of connection, he nodded and spoke.

“As Kim said, there are 9 undead Arachne in there.”

“You can converse with your Sylph?”

As I asked, Cob laughed.

“With an intermediate spirit, you have a special method to communicate with them.”

“Wow.....”

If only my spirits could get there, scouting or giving orders would be much easier. I really have to consistently raise my main skill.

“Was there anything else?”

At Derrick’s question, Cob nodded his head.

Derrick pretended to mull it over for a moment then decided.

“Everyone will clean up and we’ll go back. If we leave these things here, the black magician can use them again.”

“I agree.”

“This much is easy.”

“My power can do this in one blow.”

With that, Derrick summoned his Kasa.

A fire giant appeared and assimilated with Derrick. Kasa has seeped into Derrick's body and it was now aglow with blue flames.

All the other elves, weapons in hand, summoned their spirits.

"Sylph, Kasa!"

-Meow.

-Mung!

I too summon my two cute spirits and took out my double guns.

"Remember what we practiced yesterday? Let's try that."

Sylph and Kasa nodded their heads.

The fight began.

Derrick swirled his sword in an instant and the flames fired randomly.

Hwalulululuk-!

"Kuah!"

“Ahhh!”

“Uhahhh!”

In an instant, a river of fire swept in leaving zombies mingling in a pile of ash!

I shoot my double guns at the zombies that Derrick didn't kill.

Tang! Tang! Taang! Tang! Tang!”

Every time I shot, the shot surprisingly hit two zombie skulls and the third zombie in the body.

The power has gotten strong enough to hit three zombies per shot!

‘Nice.’

I was excited and shot in every which direction.

In all directions within 10 m, zombies got hit by my gun and fell down.

In no time at all, there were no zombies in the gorge below the cliff.

Lastly, Derrick wielded his sword as he headed for the cave.

“This is the end.”

Kwaaaaa!

The flames that burst from the tip of the gun shot out into the cave.

Giik!

Gik!

Bbiiik!

Bleak screams rang out from inside. It is probably the sound of burning Arachne.

“Now, let’s return.”

The clean was up is done quickly and Derrick decided to head back.

“It feels lacking to go back empty handed, let us gather some spoils of war on the way up.”

At Cob’s words, Derrick laughed and nodded his head.

“Fine.”

“Spoils of war?”

I asked. One veteran elf taught me.

“The spider webs. If we bring some back, the women will love it. It makes good clothing.”

“Ah!”

We, using Cob’s Sylph’s power, gathered the webs spread here and there on the cliff.

The stickiness has been taken out so it was easy to gather.

‘It would be awesome to make this into a shirt and wear it.’

An incredible shirt immune to swords! It would be an impressive piece of defensive equipment that would save my life multiple times over.

We got all the Arachne webs and climbed back to the top of the cliff. The pile of webs were mountain high.

“You have come back earlier than expected?”

“Wow, what is all this?”

“The wife will love it. Is it okay if I take some as well?”

Derrick gestured to it.

“Everyone take as much as you need.”

“Score!”

“Everyone get yours.”

“Don’t be too greedy. What is left we should give to the young ones.”

“Kim, you come get some too. Oh wait, do you not have a woman to make you any?”

At Cob’s words, I couldn’t help but groan a little.

I miss Min-jeong! No, it’s not like she has the skills to take this and turn it into a shirt, but still.

“My wife can make it for you. Kim, what would you like to be made?”

Asked Derrick.

Oh Derrick!

Then, with the eldest mother be making mine? She's the eldest, so she probably has the best skills?

"A shirt to wear inside."

"That is a good choice. Understood."

Derrick gathered my portion of web for me.

And the web that is left was decided to be distributed to the other men.

"All the men will go crazy if these are made into bow thimbles."

"That should be enough."

We all headed back for the village. There was no longer a need for us to guard this cliff.

First, I will rest and then think up more defenses.

The old veteran warrior elves all returned and the mothers came racing towards them.

“Honey!”

“You have all come back?”

“You are early, honey!”

“Welcome back, honey!”

Yep.

Of course, their companions are the over-200-year-old mothers of this village.

The eldest mother too came out clinging towards Derrick.

“Oh my, what web is this? Is this Arachne webbing?”

“It is.”

“Oh my, my, give it here. I will make you something good.”

“Thank you.”

Derrick softly brushed her hair and the eldest mother loved the gesture.

At the affectionate scene of the middle-aged couple, I felt jealously and sadness again.

“I also request a shirt for Kim.”

“Ah, of course. Kim doesn’t have a companion.”

‘Kuhuk.’

Suddenly treated as single.

But then.

There is a small child running towards us. A very cute girl, it is Elise.

Elise grabs the ankle of the eldest mother’s pants tightly and shook it.

“What is it Elise?”

Elise pointed to the spider webs.

“This? These will be turned into clothing for Derick and Kim... Oh!”

The eldest mother must have realized something and gave Elise a handful.

“Make it your best. Kim said he wants a shirt.”

“Hehehe.”

Elise smiled bashfully at me, hugged the webbing with both arms, and disappeared.

I am not thinking and just stood there blankly.

Derrick’s mumbling brought me back to my senses.

“Now that I think of it, your ages are similar.”

“What?!”

“Kim, how old are you?”

Asked the eldest mother.

“I am 29.”

Do not misunderstand. In Korean age, I am 30, but really I am 29!

“Yes, similar ages. Elise is 31 this year.”

“Kuk!”

I gasped at Derrick’s words.

‘Uh, I see.’

An elf’s lifespan is 3 times as long as a human. On the outside she looks young but the real age is about 3 times more than the appearance.

“Then... the reason she took my portion of webs is...”

“She is going to make you clothing.”

“Kuk!”

It looks like making a man’s clothing is the role of the companion. But Elise making my clothes means...

“Oh, uh no! That won’t do!”

“What is there that won’t do.”

“I mean, it can’t! I am a human and I already have a girl...!”

“Nothing will be a problem. You are our family.”

“Kuaah! R-really, no!”

To get his words that are ringing like an auditory hallucination in my ear, out of my head, I raced up the Tree of Life like a crazy person.

Looking up at Kim Hyun-ho race up the tree like he was trying to escape from something, Derrick said.

“For us elves, making clothing is an expression of thanks, but he seems to have misunderstood it.”

“Hohoho, he must think a companion must make the clothes.”

Generally, making clothes was a way of showing gratitude.

The reason women made their men’s clothing was simple. In general, the most thankful thing is the companion spending his life with you.

“It is fun, let’s just leave it.”

“Aw, how do you know me so well?”

“We are a couple.”

“Hohoho.”

The cutest and oldest couple in this village were affectionate today too.

Chapter 87 - Revival (Part 1)

It had been two months since the 6th exam began.

All the while, there has been one thing that has happened.

Elise crafted me a t-shirt. Despite her young age, it was done with impressive skills. Are all elves like this?

Anyway, I said I couldn't accept it and Elise started crying and ran off somewhere and soon after, an infuriated older sister Ella returned with her.

Only after being yelled at for a long time by Ella did I realize my misunderstanding.

To appease the sulking Elise, I performed Bach's minuet for her.

As if she had never cried, she suddenly stopped and Elise became immersed in my playing.

After the piece was over, I realized that all of the village elves had gathered around me.

Eventually, with only the skills I had from getting to Suzuki violin books volume 3, I had to hold a recital.

Of course, normally, it takes a couple years to even get to this

point.

Anyway, the music took the elf village by storm.

“It is really a wonderful melody!”

“We should make an instrument like that too!”

As far as instruments go, they just had a reed flute so the elves were in a mad race to make an instrument like the violin.

And surprisingly, a certain young female elf makes an instrument very similar to the jang.

The instrument is coined the elven harp and prorogated quickly and in no time the music did not stop in the village.

The men especially liked to listen to the music so they say it has become a virtue and a task for women?

‘These elves are scary.’

Teaching them any one thing, their ripple effect is no joke.

I promised myself once again, but I will never teach them about gambling.

On top of it all, the threat of the undead was gone and the days passed by leisurely, and all that time, I used my spirit summons to practice my newly created style of marksmanship.

By forcing the bullet's rotation to accelerate, it maximized the force and thus increased its penetrating power!

The normal gun's rifling in a spiral, the bullet that gets shot rides those spirals before getting shot out.

At the moment of the shot, Sylph increases the spin of the bullet, making the bullet an incredible screw.

I tested the power, and surprisingly, the bullet penetrated a rock.

I mean, normally the bullet ricochets off the rock instead.

What incredible penetrating power!

'At this rate, even if the opponent defense can't be penetrated by regular bullets, it should work now, right?'

It is a power that far surpasses common sense.

In a short distance of 10 m, I think with a gun like this, it would go through even a bullet proof jacket.

This is it.

In order to survive in the Arena, with methods like this, I had to evolve my skills.

Not relying on comfortable tools but by combining my main skills synergistically.

After developing a new shooting method, I felt more at ease, and turned my attention once more to the elves' problems.

The undead army. We didn't know when and where they would be coming from.

Currently, a widespread search network was being used for impenetrable security, but if we suddenly had to fight straight on, I don't know how that would go.

'The elves are incredible, but nonetheless, their small numbers are disappointing.'

With Derrick as their representative, veteran warrior elves over the age of 200 numbers only 34.

Younger male elves like Jake, there are 97.

The number of mothers and younger females is about the same. In a time of emergency, they have the power to fight, but we still

lack power.

‘To keep the entire Brown mountain as their territory and maintain it, the numbers are insufficient.’

I got an idea and quietly approached the eldest mother.

“What would you think of having another elf village on the Brown mountain?”

“Another village?”

“Yes, is that not a possibility?”

“Why would it not be? The Brown mountain is extensive, even with more elves living here, we would be living with ample room.”

“Don’t you think that there are other elves out there whose Tree of Life in their areas has deteriorated and therefore they have become targets for humans?”

“I am sure there are. The ones that came to us after being slaves, that is their story as well. Only if the Tree of Life is well would there would be no instance of elves being such easy prey to humans.”

The eldest mother’s face was full of sadness and pity.

I continued.

“Then what do you think of calling those elves here and forming another village?”

“An elf’s village must have a Tree of Life... Ah!”

The eldest mother has realized something.

I knew it too.

In an elf village, in its center must be a Tree of Life. Not only does it give them power from nature but also spiritual support.

But aren’t there two Trees of Life on this Brown mountain?

“With the newly growing Tree of Life from the southwest as the center.”

“Yes, I have heard that that small Tree of Life is growing steadily every day, thanks to you.”

“If another elf village were to exist here, the population would grow by that much as well, if and when the undead attack, we will have that much more of an advantage in fighting.”

“That is a good idea. First, let us ask the ones that came from

slavery.”

After that, everything fell into place.

It is because of the 10 former elf slaves, there were 3 elder women who joined the mothers’ meeting.

“The Tree of Life withered away for reasons we could not understand and to avoid the invasion of humans, we had to hide deep within the forest.”

“I am from that same village. I thought maybe the Tree of Life would get better I went out to check on it only to find that humans were hiding there...”

These two mothers are from the same village.

“That is strange. A similar thing happened to my village.”

After hearing it all, I told the eldest mother my theory.

“Most likely, I think the evil black magicians’ plot is to go against all the elves on the continent.”

“The black magicians attacking us?”

I continued to explain.

“Elf slaves are sold for a high price, so they can easily sway a neighboring land for their aid. Using whatever method, when the magicians wither a Tree of Life, that land’s army swoops in and takes the elves, that is their pattern.”

“How awful! They have continued such evil, now it is our turn to act!”

“Yes, but of course that is only my theory, we can’t be sure.”

The eldest mother was pissed.

“I am sure that they are targeting the Trees of Life. Based on that alone, they are our sworn enemies.”

“I agree.”

“Thanks to you we were able to preserve our Tree of Life. It is a great relief.”

The eldest mother looked at me with a warm gaze.

“I will follow your view. As an elf myself, how could I turn a blind eye to such troubles that have affected my brethren? We will bring them to the Brown mountain.”

“I heard there are other trees on the Brown mountain with the

potential to be turned into Trees of Life, I wonder if I could nurture those as well.”

“With your powers, I have no doubt you could! Well... ..”

“One village to each Tree of Life, if there are lots of villages made on Brown mountain, wouldn’t Brown mountain become an impenetrable elf territory?”

“Incredible! If everyone gathered together, no one could defeat us.”

At the end of their discussion, the mothers agreed to follow my thinking.

First, they decided to get the elves from the village that two of the three slave mothers came from.

“I shall take care of that.”

Said Derrick.

It is a task that required leaving Brown mountain. As much of a dangerous task it is in that the elves have to step foot and cut across human lands, there is no choice but for best warrior, Derrick, to put his foot forward.

Derrick picked 2 more veteran warriors, and then he picked

another three younger male elves to have them experience the outside world.

I plead to Derrick.

“As much as possible, it would be good to stay within Odin’s lands.”

“I will accept his help. We have made a treaty, I am sure he will accommodate us.”

I have to give a flame to the Tree of Life so I could not go with them.

The two mothers who were slaves went with them as guides and thus, Derrick’s group departed.

“You are really going to leave this Tree of Life to us?”

The faces of the older female elves were deeply touched.

In a little less than 2 months-time, Derrick returned, his task complete.

The elves that had lost their village and had to live in hiding deep

in the forest were brought safely here.

On the way, they met elf hunters three times, but everyone says Derrick took care of them.

And so, the not quite 100 elves that had just arrived on the Brown mountain were given the small Tree of Life as their new home.

“The tree is far from fully grown so it is not quite ready to be the center of a village.”

Said the eldest mother.

The mothers from the new village waved their hands.

“No, it is not so! As much as it has yet to grow, its potential is infinite. Not only that, despite its small size, it is already a full-fledged Tree of Life.”

“Thank you sincerely for giving us a new home.”

Like that, a new elf village was formed.

In order to differentiate between the two villages, this one is called the “Pine tree village.” Our village is called “Zelkova Tree Village.”

Thanks to the creation of pine tree village, the burden scouting the area became a lot lighter.

Thanks to the Tree of Life, the warriors in the pine tree village were, little by little, recuperating and they were enthusiastic about guarding their new home.

‘Good, because of this, our power has grown a lot.’

My impulsive idea has yielded great results.

‘What if we could make more villages this way?’

If we grew another tree and made another village?

Then, we can easily drive the undead-group-controlling-black magicians’ plot to the ground.

And I would clear the mission without raising a hand!

‘This is why people should use their heads.’

Without personally fighting and shedding blood, I was able to be an important role in clearing this mission!

“Let’s raise another one!”

I ran to the mothers and insisted.

The mothers were already aware of my grand plans and gave me a hearty welcome.

“For now, we will use your power to focus on creating a new Tree of Life.”

Said the eldest mother.

“On the northwest side, there is a maple tree that has the potential to be a Tree of Life. When taking into consideration the location, I think that one would be suitable.”

“Then I guess the next village will be the Maple Tree Village.”

“Hohoho, I guess so.”

Name: Maple Tree Village Project

I made two flames of life and gave it to the elves scouting the northwest side.

I spent my days training on top of the giant Tree of Life in the Zelkova Village.

I think I will focus on raising my spirit summons and athleticism

skills.

If I use my head right, I can sit in place and clear this mission.

It was when it had been about a fortnight after starting the maple tree village project.

With spirit summons and violin practice, it wasn't the athleticism skill but an odd skill that increased.

-Flame of life (synthesis skill): blow in a flame of life and give life. 2 uses per day.

*Intermediate level 2: effective for treating: recovery, anti-aging, illness, and curses.

‘Huh?’

Now that I think of it, I guess it isn't odd at all.

I diligently made 2 every day, it would have been weird for it to not increase.

‘I wonder if the skill has a higher effect when using it, the more the skill level increases?’

In an RPG game, the more damage an attack does to a monster, the more xp you get.

I felt I have realized a new paradigm to skills training.

Chapter 88 - Revival (Part 2)

Having raised the flame of life to intermediate level 2 was great news.

After that, the maple tree village project sped up.

Every day, I fed it two flames of life, and it grew up like a bamboo shoot, up and up.

The effects of an intermediate level 2 flame going in every day, the life force spilling from it was clear.

12 months...

The exam was to protect the Brown Mountain elves, and so far, just 4 months have passed by.

In that time, I had gained a lot of results.

First, we scouted the bottom of the cliff and managed to discover the dark magician's plans and obliterated the remaining zombies.

Also, we gathered elves that had nowhere to go and created the pine tree village.

This small village, with a small population of 100 elves, treated this pine tree growing as a Tree of Life as if it was as precious as

their own lives.

Not only that, they had joined together with the Zelkova tree villages' veteran warriors and in case of the undead army's infiltration, they had created a strong line of defense.

They were determined not to lose their newly found home.

With the Tree of Life that was growing well, the pine tree village's warriors, who had lost their strength, found that it was slowly returning.

'If the maple tree wakes itself as a Tree of Life, another village could be created!'

I can clear this exam, sitting in the same spot.

Now there was just one thing I wished for.

'I want for there to not be a fight until the maple village is created.'

The dark magician has nearly exhausted his zombie hordes at the cliff, and I hypothesized that the magician will need some time to replenish his undead army.

The exam's duration was 12 months.

Probably, the real war would start in the second half. They wouldn't have given a mission to fight like a hound dog for 12 months.

‘Odin said he had an exam where he was preparing for war for a whole year.’

I figured that this exam would be graded on how well I prepared.

Of course, this was all my speculation and I had no idea what was actually going to happen.

After another month has passed, so a total of 5 months, I heard some great news.

“The maple tree has started growing into a Tree of Life.”

“Already?”

At my surprise, Derrick made a hardly seen joyous expression.

“Yes. It is gobbling up your flames and growing well.”

“Um, how is it as being the center of a village? Isn't it still too lacking?”

“It is lacking but for the elves that have already lost their Tree of

Life, that isn't something to split hairs over. A tree that has the potential to become a Tree of Life isn't hard to find but it is very difficult to wake up that potential and help it to grow properly."

Hmm, and on top of that, this Brown Mountain already has two elf villages and it is a safe area where they could protect each other.

A new village, and the maple tree's growth will bring elves here.

"Should we grow another village now then?"

"Let's."

We delivered this news to the mothers at Zelkova village.

"In that case, like the pine tree village, we should find elves that have lost their homes."

Said the eldest mother happily.

Gathering the 8 elves that previously lived as slaves, they were asked where their native homes were and where their elves were hiding and living.

"In the hiding place I was in, there were 34 elves from my village. But that is from 7 years ago, I wonder how much that number must have shrunk by now....."

Said the mother who used to be a slave. She was now new member of the mothers.

“The place where our village was hiding has already been attacked by humans.”

Said one of the two adult elves.

Then another spoke.

“I was attacked during a scouting mission. Our hiding place has either not been found yet or if they managed to escaped to a new safe place, there will be 41 in that forest.”

The remaining 5 young elves all had their homes already raided and their friends and families all have been enslaved by humans.

‘Damn.’

The more I heard their stories about the barbaric nature of humans became the stronger my rage and hatred became.

‘Greedy bastards. Would it hurt them to just live peacefully amongst each other?’

Even on Earth, there was the barbaric history of enslaving other races, making colonies from them.

I thought maybe humans are animals that can't help themselves.

“Bring all of them from the two spots.”

Decided the eldest mother.

As if it was a given, the other mothers nodded their heads in agreement.

There was no talk of choosing one over the other. Because they could not turn their head towards only one.

Derrick took charge of one and the other was led by the veteran warrior Cob.

In order to set up a new village, the two teams embarked.

‘Good luck!’

While we awaited their safe return, I made the flames of life and trained my skills like I always did.

Because the maple tree had started growing as a Tree of Life, I started giving it one flame and gave the other flame to the pine tree village.

The pine tree village was extremely thankful.

After a fortnight has passed, a letter arrived from Odin.

The person who said he came from the Count of Wolfenbrook left as soon as they delivered the letter.

[You were carrying out some fun plans. I too am doing my best to assist in saving the elves and moving them to Brown mountain. If it goes according to your plan, I don't think we will have to worry about the undead attack.

I am currently in the midst of a war with Count Bastian. The bastards known as the Silver Clan lycanthropes...I get the sense that they have joined the humans and are assisting him.

But they aren't strong enough to be considered as an enemy for me. They fear me and are avoiding a full-scale war, but I think we will be able to settle this within 3 months.

I will help as soon as this war is over. Since we are allies.

-Odin]

It is all thanks to treating his daughter Bella. Odin is sincerely aiding me with everything he has.

Anyway, hearing that Odin was winning the war took a weight off my shoulders.

‘However, those Silver clan guys, getting full of it day by day.’

I recalled Leon Silver.

Juno, Hye-su, Kang Cheon-sung, the day I lost them, Leon silver could not have been scarier.

Lycanthropes, unbelievably intelligent and charismatic.

But now that I look at it, he is not a scary figure as he was then.

He was not intelligent.

Absorbing human culture and methods and strengthening his clan left a lasting impression on me, but he is a frog stuck in a well.

‘It is the arrogance of the ignorant.’

Basically, thinking that he himself was the strongest thing is Leon Silver’s greatest weakness.

Probably, in a short while, he will taste the bitterness of defeat.

‘If the opportunity occurs, I would like to finish him with my own hand.’

I have now grown so much I am unrecognizable compared to back then. Even if I were to fight the silver clan by myself, I had some level of confidence.

My comrades' revenge, I have to do it myself for me to release my resentment and sorrow.

‘This exam, after dealing with the undead’s invasion, if I get some time, I will go look for them.’

Of course, I am not reckless so I won’t go trekking into the world alone.*

It would be plenty if I take one or two warriors like Jake.

7 months since the start of the exam.

Derrick and Bob’s teams have returned.

Derrick’s team brought back 31 elf migrants, and Cob’s team brought back 26 surviving elf migrants.

Due to their small numbers, we suggested that the two groups combine and live together in the maple tree village, and they happily agreed.

“It really is a Tree of Life!”

“It is small but growing well!”

“I can sense a strong force of life. Huk, how beautiful this is... ...
!”

The elves were moved by the maple tree that had recently awoken as a Tree of Life and was growing at a rapid pace.

It was a scene that showed just how precious the Tree of Life was to the elves.

‘How dare they try take something so precious.’

The ones called the dark magicians, once again I found them to be disgusting creatures.

Humans, how much hurt must they cause before they are satisfied.

‘I will quash them all.’

Anyway, that is how 57 elves became the maple tree village in the Northwest.

The Zelkova tree village.

The pine tree village.

And the maple tree village.

The original owners of the Brown mountain, the Zelkova village, was located on the inside of the ridge with the pine and maple tree village's surrounding it.

It can be seen that the pine tree village and the maple tree village have become defense blocks against the undead invasion.

But the two villages don't feel bad about it at all.

They made their decision beforehand after hearing that the undead might attack and moreover, they were ecstatic at having been given a Tree of Life.

Even with that, there were new suggestions made by the maple tree village.

"We have looked around and found there are two more trees with the potential to be Trees of Life."

"How would it be if we grew those as Trees of Life and brought more of our kind who are in circumstances like we were?"

It was a suggestion made by some of the representatives, mothers

from the maple tree village, who came to us.

The eldest mother of the Zelkova village then asked.

“Have you heard of any unfortunate brethren of ours?”

“Yes, I have only heard through hearsay so we will have to look.”

With this as their topic, the Zelkova village mothers began to discuss.

Should I call it a discussion...

It was scary chatter.

At the end of the chatter, the eldest mother announced the decision.

“We will ask for aid from our ally, the count of Wolfenbrooke.”

Her decision was as follows.

She will send elves to the count of Wolfenbrooke and while they help in Odin’s war they will also would have the task of finding hidden elves.

“As they bring more of us, if their numbers are small, we will join

them into the maple tree village. And Kim.”

“Yes, mother.”

“You were able to make two flames of life, right? Continue giving one to the maple tree village, and the other, let’s use to start growing the other Tree of Life.”

“I understand.”

First, we have to ask Odin if he will comply with our request.

Veteran warrior Cob went to the count of Wolfenbrooke. He rode Sylph and flew quickly to Odin who heard his request, and returned.

“He said he will work to make it happen.”

At Cob’s news, the eldest mother carried out her plan immediately.

It was a dangerous mission that would require fighting alongside Odin against Count Bastian, so with Cob, another 5 veteran warriors were sent.

Derrick stayed on Brown Mountain, not knowing when the fight with the undead will happen.

Like that, within 10 days of Cob and his team going to Count Wolfenbrooke, we started seeing results.

“Shameless Bastian and his men had 9 of our people as slaves.”

Impressively, Cob’s team infiltrated Count Bastian’s palatial residence.

There, they assassinated five of Bastian’s family members, and rescued 9 elves that were enslaved there, accomplishing some amazing military merits.

Because of it, Bastian and his forces were thrown into massive disarray which made Odin very happy.

‘Really amazing. Veteran warriors!’

Thus the 9 rescued elves were split between the pine tree village and the maple tree village.

We were going to send everyone to the maple tree village but there were two of them that were originally from the same village as the pine tree village elves.

The pine village reunited with 2 lost family members and became a sea of tears.

Like this, the Brown mountain elves used their crisis as an

opportunity for revival.

Chapter 89 - Invasion (1)

After 8 months had passed, a suspicious trend was detected.

“We have detected traces of all kinds of monsters.”

The news was delivered by warriors from the Pine Tree Village.

Derrick returned to the village.

The veteran warriors were on break so they joined the mothers in a meeting.

I was atop the Tree of Life and practicing my violin. I too was called to this meeting.

The idea of starting a new village came from me, and among the elves I became an important adviser.

“Like you said, they said that the evidence of the Arachne is greatest. Moreover, there is no way that such giant monsters would move in groups that size, so we can safely assume they are undead and are being manipulated.”

Said Derrick.

“The fact that they have shown themselves must mean that it is almost time to fight. Have you told the news to the Maple Tree

Village?”

“Of course.”

At the eldest mother’s question, the warrior from the Pine Tree Village nodded his head.

We kept going with the meeting when suddenly Derrick stared at me.

“What do you think?”

I got the sense that Derrick really valued my opinions.

I first organized all the thoughts in my head.

Everything is a hint.

The truths I have learned after becoming an examinee, I always remembered and I took everything that happens around me as a warning.

The same went for this situation.

The fact that the bastards have shown themselves, I had a feeling this was something.

And the thoughts that kept coming at the ends of more thoughts.....

“Kim?”

At Derrick’s question, I said.

“The bastards are playing tricks.”

“Tricks?”

“Does something come to mind?”

Everyone’s attention was focused on me.

I said.

“I find it suspicious that they showed themselves on purpose. Why not just attack and just show us a glimpse?”

“When you say it that...”

“That is really weird.”

“It is them saying they are bent on attacking.”

Said Derrick.

“In that case, this time too, like the zombie horde, they will focus our attention on this and be up to something somewhere else.”

“Yes, they have probably sensed the increase in the elf population on the Brown Mountain. Instead of a head on attack, they are probably thinking of a different strategy.”

“What is that?”

“I have carefully theorized something.”

“Speak your mind.”

Said the eldest mother.

I carefully said what I was thinking.

“Think of when the entire continent of elves lost their trees and were attacked by humans.”

“The more I think about it, the angrier it makes me. When I think of the Trees of Life hurt by the acts of the dark magicians...!”

“How could they!”

The mothers expressed their anger.

I continued speaking.

“The human armies trapped elves as slaves. Living elves. Then what happened to the elves that died fighting?”

“...!”

“Dead... dead elves... ...!”

“No!”

Everyone’s faces were shocked.

“If those bastards were willing to turn their own kind, the humans, into zombies, what would they have thought when they saw the elves? If those elves befell a tragedy by the hands of the dark magicians...”

“They would have turned them into undead...”

“Evil bastards!”

“How could they... ...!”

Everyone was furious.

Some mothers were about to weep.

I was angry too but these elves, considering they were the same race, how would they feel?

“Showing us a hint of the giant monsters to us is to move our attention towards that. When they are actually going to use our brethren, who have become undead, to attack us covertly using their speed and agility.”

At Derricks word's, I nodded my head.

“I think so. Right now, immediately, deliver the news and warn the villages and we have to make a sign that only we can identify. Like wrapping a band around our arms for example.”

“That sounds good. Everyone can wear a cloth band on their right arm. Women, children, everyone.”

The eldest mother's decision was final.

Derrick got up from his seat.

“I will go let the Maple Tree Village know.”

“I will let our Pine Tree Village know.”

The Pine Tree Village messenger got up from his seat.

The warning system for the Brown Mountain's three villages was now put in place.

Everyone wrapped a cloth band on their right arm, and I did it too.

A week later, my premonitions were shown to be correct.

That day, Derrick was out scouting at night when he discovered a group of five elves, and after verifying they had no bands, he immediately stabbed them all.

Derrick summoned Kasa and rained down flames and signaled the warning to everyone.

With that signal as the start, all the warriors that had been sleeping went out altogether.

A total of 97 undead elves were annihilated that day.

As if that was not enough, all the villagers were gathered in one place, and a tally was taken to thoroughly check if the undead were hidden amongst us.

A giant battle in the middle of the night.

Our damage was the devil.

We knew ahead and were prepared, and thus it was a perfect victory.

I too was involved in the plan but I didn't fight a single time.

The reason was because the other elf warriors moved so fast.

But we could not enjoy the joys of victory.

“Uh hu hu huk!”

“Mark! It's our village's Mark!”

“Sarah! How did...!”

“Evil bastards!”

Amongst the undead elves, a considerable amount were family members from the Pine Tree Village and Maple Tree Village.

And a sight I could hardly watch occurred.

The familiar faces were cremated and taken care of by the Pine

Tree Village and Maple Tree Village, and the rest were cremated and their ashes spread at a location central to the three villages.

“Let us all combine our strengths and overcome this so that a thing like this never happens to us again.”

The eldest mother gave a word of encouragement where all the elves from the three villages were gathered.

And when the funeral was over, the elves approached me.

“Kim!”

“You were impressive.”

“If it weren’t for you, we would have been in trouble.”

“You are a gift to us.”

“Nature is fair. In recompense for the evil humans in the world, you have been gifted to us.”

“You are a genius!”

I was swept up in plenty of compliments.

My wisdom was acknowledged and it made me happy but at the

same time, regretful.

‘Everyone says I am this great and smart, but why did I keep failing the civil exam!’

‘You hadn’t starved yet and come to your senses.’

The baby angel’s words of truth lingered in my ear.

“How did you fail?!”

Puk!

A man let out his rage as he struck a tree with his cane.

A middle aged man, so thin one almost wouldn’t think he could be alive, was dressed in a brownish dirty robe and had a pale complexion.

With the raging skinny middle aged man in front, there were two young men in robes, with their heads hung down in shame, who don’t know what to do

“That is... ..”

“We haven’t found the culprit...”

“Useless idiots!”

The middle-aged man’s cane flew out towards the young men.

Puuk! Puk!

“Kuk!”

“Uk!”

Each man was hit once on the head causing blood to flow down their faces.

“The time poured into this effort has already neared 3 years! 3 years! What other places do in 1 or 2 years, is taking 3!”

The middle aged man spoke as if reciting history.

“Why did the tree that was cursed to wither doing better than it was before, and why have the Brown Mountain elves’ numbers nearly doubled in such a short time?!”

“Our apologies, sir.”

“I am sorry!”

The men were intimidated and started off with apologies.

Their pathetic state only seemed to make the middle-aged man even angrier.

“Think, think! How are those stupid elves suddenly aware of all our plans?!”

The elves they were used dealing with weren't the kind that were this agile and quick with their decisions.

Their attentions were lacking as long as their lives were long and slow.

That is why the three of them decided to go after the most powerful elves, which lived on Brown Mountain, without a problem.

In the beginning, it went just as according to plan.

A curse was put on the Tree of Life, then they directed the elf warrior's focus elsewhere.

While doing so, using a plentiful amount of human corpses, they turned them into zombies and continuously attacked and weakened the elves.

While attacking with zombies, they created zombies from big monster corpses and were going to attack with them.

Having lost the Tree of Life, the elves would be weak and unable to stop that attack.

But now, somehow, the Tree of Life overcame the curse and was stronger. On top of that, another Tree of Life had been created.

They had lost all the zombies from the cliff.

The middle aged man reported to the higher ups that the failure of the zombie attack was a part of the plan.

His anxiety was growing so he decided to use all of the precious elf undead he had been saving for a later attack.

‘But how is this possible? Why did it fail?!’

In a single day, the undead elves were annihilated.

There was not a single elf with a dark spell on it.

In a single night.

As if they had been waiting for it, the elves overcame it at with no problems.

‘There is no way those old elf bitches are this smart!’

The older women elves that are called the mothers have a discerning eye regarding the future but were weak in urgent situations that are constantly in flux.

Because of that they were able to attack the elves in these matriarchal societies.

But this time around, the opponent was more sharp and agile than they were.

There is no way it is the work of an elf.

‘That’s right, the Wolfenbrooke, Baron Odin, has formed an alliance with the elves.’

The elves that have lost their villages are making a mass move and the count of Wolfenbrooke helped them.

In return, the strong elves are going to help the count of Wolfenbrooke fight Baron Bastian.

The Brown Mountain elves have allied with a human, which is very unlike elves. In that case... ..

‘It is a human.’

A very smart human that has the confidence (of the elves) and was able to move them to action.

“M-master.”

“What should we report to the superior authority?”

Carefully asked the two useless idiots.

The middle-aged man found himself pathetic for having two guys like these as his disciples.

“We have to tell them honestly that we failed and come up with a new plan!”

“Hik?!”

“But, then, we... ...!”

The two disciples' faces were overcome with fear.

“But just a failure won't do.”

The master's words continued.

“There has to be at least one outcome so that we are forgiven for it!”

“What outcome are you speaking of... ...?”

“A human, you fools!”

The master flung around his cane once again and beat his disciples and yelled.

“The human advising the elves, we have to at least eliminate that one!”

“There is such a human?”

“Ah... that is why the elves have become so smart... ...”

It seemed that the pathetic disciples weren't even able to think that far.

The master screamed.

“He is a character that is big hindrance to our plans going forward! But thankfully we have taken care of him! That is the only way I can save face! We have to put everything we've got into this and at least get rid of that guy!”

“Even the elf undead have failed, how will we assassinate him?”

“He is definitely getting the elves’ protection.....”

“You stupid idiots! Of course impossible assassinating him is impossible!”

“Well, then?”

The master spoke.

“Put in all the monsters! It is a full scale war. We have to take advantage of the chaos of war if we are to have a chance at eliminating him.”

Chapter 90 - Invasion (Part 2)

The full-scale offensive began.

The Arachne were a given and all kinds of other giant monsters made an appearance.

‘The bastards were bursting out from all directions.’

That was the only way to see it.

With all their plans having failed, they were just gambling on attacking with everything they’ve got.

‘Or is there another plan in play?’

When I thought about it, there was no way these guys were that simple.

Think.

They are the ones who have mastered the dark magic that had been banned by the entire continent.

How long they have stayed hidden? In all that time, how careful must they have become?

Men like that are just attacking willy-nilly?

I got the feeling that they might be using this time to make a play for something else.

‘The Tree of Life?’

The only thing to immediately pop into my mind was that.

But that is not something I had specifically warned the elves about.

Already, there are two to three veteran warriors guarding the Tree of Life in each village.

The Tree of Life is as important as their own lives, of course they took action to protect all of the trees.

“I will fight too.”

“Can’t you just stay in the village?”

The eldest mother implored.

“My dearest Derrick compliments that your skills have greatly improved, but to us you are a very precious being.”

“I am a man too. Everyone is fighting, I cannot just stay and hide in the village.”

“But.....”

“Even without fighting, Kim, you have already played a huge role.”

“Yes, this is our fight so leave it to our warriors?”

“It’ll be a big problem if you fight and die.”

The mothers, one by one, worried about me and tried to stop me.

I spoke.

“Do not fret. I too value my life above all else. If I get even the slightest whiff of something bad, I will retreat.”

The eldest mother could no longer beg me not to go and allowed it.

“Then please be careful.”

“Yes.”

I headed to where the battle was the fiercest.

The bastards were attacking from the northwest, west, and southwest directions.

The Maple Tree Village in the northwest, the Pine Tree Village in the southwest, and in the west, our Zelkova Tree Village was taking care of them.

Of course, in the Maple Tree Village where their fighting power wasn't as strong, warriors from the Zelkova Tree Village went to their aid.

I went to the west where Derrick was fighting.

The warriors of the Zelkova Tree Village were very distinguished.

Not only the veterans but the young warriors as well, their fighting was amazing.

Pat!

In an instant, one went up a tree and shot an arrow, then hung from a branch upside down with his two feet and shot another.

Chwak! Chwak!

“Keek!”

“Keleek!”

The Arachne were hit with arrows and stumbled.

One Arachne shot out a web, but the young male elf quickly twisted his body midair and escaped.

‘Woah, the effects of playing tag!’

Indeed.

Dodging quickly in order to not get caught atop the Tree of Life, those skills from those games of tag were making their appearance here.

The game of tag training has had a sure impact!

‘I’ll see the results of my training too!’

My improved power skills in shooting thanks to Sylph and Kasa!

First, I summoned my Mosin-Nagant.

“Sylph, Kasa, remember?”

-Meow!

-Mung mung!

Sylph and Kasa nodded their heads.

Sylph held the Mosin-Nagant and pulled the action lever then assumes shooting position. Next to her, Kasa was standing patiently.

If I were to take a picture, I think Cha Ji-hye would have fainted from the cuteness of this scene.

Using the power of the two spirits, the strong Mosin-Nagant's began shooting.

Tang-

“Keek!”

An Arachne had its eye penetrated and collapsed right where it stood.

Tang!

“Kuek!”

Another shot landed on the neck of a giant monster with green skin. The green monster spewed out blood from its neck.

I recalled the name of that monster from pictures I've seen in books, the troll.

I was told a bullet wouldn't penetrate the skin of a troll but the Mosin-Nagant shot it and now it was bleeding.

'I've gotten stronger!'

I felt a pang of gladness.

The troll did not bother to avoid the bullet and it stumbled.

Tang-

"Kuek!"

Sylph shot again and it landed on the neck again. At Sylph's ruthless blows, the troll fell to the ground.

I had become strong enough to collapse a troll in an instant.

Surpassing the limits of a gun, I had attained a stronger attack using spirits.

If I continued to progress this way, I think it would work for exams going forward.

While the spirits attack one by one with the Mosin-Nagant, I took out my double guns and approached the monsters.

“Sheek-.”

“Sheeek-.”

“Sheek-.”

The monsters making this weird rattlesnake noises were lizardmen.

With a height similar to a full-grown man, their bodies were entirely covered in scales.

They had arms and legs and walked upright like humans but it was a monster closer to reptiles than it was to an alien.

Their weapons are sharp nails.

I thought I wouldn't be able to do much damage because their scales are hard, but thankfully their abdominal area is oddly soft and the guns worked on them.

I concentrated on their abdomens and shot my guns.

Taaaang-

“Sheek!”

“Shweek!”

Two lizardmen fell.

The lizardmen behind them had no fear and continued to move forward. They saw how their comrade in front of them died, but because they are undead, they don't seem to have the ability to learn from their comrade's deaths.

I continued to aim at the abdomens and dropped them.

But there is an advantage to the undead.

The bastards that fell from being shot in the abdomen started to twitch and get back up again.

‘This is annoying.’

At this rate, this is just a waste of bullets.

“Divine Protection of the Wind!”

I jumped into the air.

With the gust of wind, my body was thrust high into the air.

I landed atop a tree and I immediately pulled out the magnum bullets and placed them into an empty chamber.

‘I will just leave the killing to the spirits’ shooting and I’ll just run and avoid them.’

Sylph and Kasa were definitely making a difference with their one shot one kill.

When the bullets ran out, Sylph quickly reloaded from the box of 7.62 mm bullets at her side.

The fight continued like this when.

-It is you.

Suddenly, a voice rang through.

How should I put it?

It was not a voice that permeated through the air by a voice.

Something that cannot be heard through the senses?

That is how strange it is.

“Who are you?”

I shouted.

-Who do you think?

Suddenly, before my eyes, a black smoke grew tall.

The black smoke gave way to a shape. A worn-out robe worn by a thin middle-aged man. Perhaps like the appearance of a monk from the middle ages?

“Dark magician?”

-Ha, more accurately, I am a necromancer. There are divisions of black magic too.

It looked like the thin middle-aged man was smiling.

-You are the one lending your wisdom to the elves. Are you a subordinate of count of Wolfenbrooke?

“A friend.”

-Haha, is that so? You do not deny you lend your wisdom to the elves though.

“You already know anyway.”

-You are indeed smart. It would be a waste. If you were to be my disciple in black magic, I think you would do very well.

“No need for that. I’m terrible at studying.”

Although it may be different if I had to study in order to not starve, I guess.

-Anyhow, I have to at least kill you. I have to at least accomplish that.

“You have to accomplish that? I guess you have an organization.”

-..... I have made a mistake. My lips were careless. Well, no matter.

The middle-aged man’s eyes became dark.

-Since I’m going to kill you anyway.

In an instant, the middle-aged man disappeared into a black

smoke.

The black smoke poured onto me.

“What?!”

It alarmed me and I immediately jumped towards the sky. Thank goodness I still had some time on the Divine Protection of the Wind left.

But the fog chased after me.

The black fog, once again, turned into the shape of the middle-aged man. With the cane he is holding, he started waving it towards me.

Boong!

“Kuk!”

I barely twisted my body and avoided it.

-Hmph.

The middle-aged man clicked his tongue in disappointment.

I got an uneasy feeling and escaped the area with all my might

and it seemed my feelings were correct.

Seeing how disappointed he was about the attack with his cane, I don't think it was a simple attack.

‘Does that cane place a curse?’

He is a dark magician, it is well within his means.

I spun in a circle in the air and shot my double guns towards the middle-aged man.

Tang-

The two Neilson H2's shot. The bullets hit and passed through the middle-aged man.

Just like that, they literally passed through him.

All that happened was that the part that was hit dispersed the black smoke.

The dispersed fog reassembled to its previous form.

‘Does force not work on him?’

Is he just an apparition?

‘No.’

When he moved to hit me with his cane, his movements were too real to be just an illusion.

-You use a fun weapon.

The middle-aged man laughed and headed for me again. He came at me like a phantom and it gave me a creepy feeling.

‘Hold on, smoke?’

Let’s try this out. Before all the time for the Divine Protection of the Wind runs out.

The moment he came near me, I did a somersault as I spun and kicked.

Paat!

A kick that made a semicircle, like a martial arts move.

And from my foot, a burst of air flew towards the middle-aged man.

-Kuk!

The middle-aged man got pushed far back. The power of the attack was not that strong but his whole body was black smoke and nearly split in half.

Did the wind really work?

Because he is smoke?

I put away my double guns and got in a boxing stance.

The boxing I thought I would never be able to use, began.

I continuously jabbed at the middle-aged man.

The strong gusts made the middle-aged man's head fly up and down.

Pupupung-puung!

-Kuk! You bastard!

Every time I hit him, the middle-aged man's body that had become black smoke dispersed a little bit. The middle-aged man appeared distressed.

-What in the world is this?

“What?”

-How is energy like this being put forth. You, are you a spirit summoner?

“So what?”

-Damn. Of course.

But then, a young elf nearby ran towards us.

“Kim, you okay?!”

It's Jake.

The middle-aged man saw him and clicked his tongue.

-This won't do. I thought I could personally intervene and take care of at least you but..... You really complicate things quite a bit.

“Does me being a spirit summoner complicate things?”

Then that means it wasn't the wind, but because the Divine Protection of the Wind is a derivative of spirit summons that the attack damaged him.

-Don't be happy like you've found out something. It is easily found common knowledge that black magic and spirit summons are incompatible.

“Regardless, I guess your standing in your organization has become quite complicated? Since you keep failing. So...you'll be replaced or punished?”

-Hahaha, smartass. Fine, enjoy your victory for today.

“That's the plan.”

-But remember. Now I will remember you. I will come for you.

“You want me to remember? Shouldn't you give me a name then?”

The middle-aged man laughed.

-It is John Omento. Knowing my name won't help you know anything so best not get your hopes up.

“Farewell then, John Omento. I hope you meet your end with some light punishment.”

-Hmph.

Then, the black magician, nay, the necromancer by the name of John Omento, became black smoke and dispersed into the surrounding air.

“Are you okay?”

Asked Jake.

I nodded my head.

“Yeah. I think that guy just now is the dark magician orchestrating this whole thing.”

“Really? Damn it, we should have killed him, we let him get away!”

“I don’t think he is enemy easily killed.”

Force doesn’t work on him, and he becomes black smoke and is able to move freely in the air. He can also disappear and reappear anywhere it seems.

But John Omento doesn’t seem to be good at direct combat.

Is it because he is a magician?

Instead of directly fighting, he is more accustomed to being a

special class that creates undead and orchestrates them.

I tapped Jake on the shoulder.

“Come, let’s go. Let’s finish this fight.”

Chapter 91 – The End (Part 1)

The fight was finally finished.

It was a grand victory for us.

From all corners of the Brown Mountain, the elves had achieved an overwhelming victory.

We had an ironclad defense and the head on attack by the undead army was no match for us.

“We won!”

“Did you see!”

“Never invade again!”

The warriors’ shouts rang throughout the battlefield.

Upon our triumphant return to the Zelkova Tree Village, the women and children welcomed us.

From here and there, the delightful sound of the elven harp could be heard.

“Honey!”

“Honey, you worked so hard!”

The women hugged their husbands that safely returned and rejoiced. The young men who haven't yet married also all had lovers to greet them.

‘It's just me that's alone.’

I said and I felt lonely when suddenly a young girl ran towards me.....

“Elise?”

“Hehehe.”

Elise put a crown made of flowers on my head.

“Thanks.”

I stroked her hair which made Elise so happy.

But Elise, don't fall for me. This oppa doesn't like that style.

That day was a celebration.

Victory.

Defeating the elves' enemy and protecting their home, such a joyous occasion.

The celebration went on all night, crazily. The laughter didn't end.

As the night grew deeper, I got tired and wanted to rest but the elves wouldn't let me leave. They called me the hero of this war and having them lift me up did feel good.

‘Now with this, I'm sure the exam is cleared and over with.’

The time period left was only 4 months.

I don't think that in that time frame, the dark magicians will throw another attack of this scale.

‘But I cannot be careless.’

Like I have done so far, we have to keep bringing elves to the Brown Mountain and making villages and reviving Trees of Life

So that no one lays on hand on the elves ever again.

We received word that Odin's war was in the final stages.

Baron Bastian was unable to defeat the count of Wolfenbrooke and was repeatedly defeated.

It seemed the effect of Cob and the five veteran elf warriors was immense as well. In the letter, Odin praised their contributions as the major factor.

As the war neared its end, Cob's teams' real mission sped underway.

Searching for elves that had lost their Tree of Life and were deep in hiding to avoid humans and bringing them back to the Brown Mountain.

The steady influx of these elves got placed into the population-deficient Maple Tree Village and Pine Tree Village.

But even with those two villages, as the population increased, the imminent need that another Tree of Life had to be grown became apparent.

So I decided to give two flames of life to another tree.

This time is a Thuja tree in the north.

‘This one is the Thuja village.’

But like this, with the five or so elves that came at a time, it was not enough to sustain a new village.

At the very least, there needed to be about 30 refugee elves to found a solid village and after that as more elves entered, the population of the village would grow.

‘Well, there is still time, it will work out.’

For now, I concentrated on growing the Thuja tree.

An intermediate level 2 power makes two flames of life and the Thuja tree grows well.

But then, while the Thuja tree hadn’t grown into becoming a Tree of Life yet, Cob’s team brought a large population of refugee elves.

“We heard there is a safe place for us to call home here.”

The one that looked to be the leader of this group, an older female elf, came to us and asked.

It was a large group of refugees, a total of 42 elves.

The eldest mother greeted them.

“Welcome. We will tell you where you will live.”

We guided them to the northern territory where the Thuja tree is.

Having seen the Thuja tree, the elves rejoiced and at the same time looked disappointed.

“It is a tree with the potential of a Tree of Life.”

“It looks like it is growing well.”

“But there is no way to know for sure if it will grow into one for sure...”

They had heard there was a Tree of Life where they could form a new village of their own and voyaged to the Brown Mountain for it.

But seeing as there was a Thuja tree that hadn't yet turned into a Tree of Life, their disappointment was understandable.

“But what a relief it is that we have a safe place to live.”

“Yes. Maybe it is because this mountain has a lot of trees of life

that the energy of nature is strong.”

“We will live here and care for this Thuja tree.”

The mothers of the refugees spoke to each other and made a decision.

Then, the eldest mother spoke to them.

“Do not misunderstand, please. This Thuja tree, in about a month’s time, it can be a Tree of Life.”

“What?”

“Is that true?”

“How is that possible?”

The refugee mothers were all suspicious.

The eldest mother looked at me.

“Kim, show them.”

“Yes.”

In front of everyone, I created two flames of life.

The refugees saw the flames of life and were extremely surprised.

“How full of life energy!”

“If it consumes that energy, the Thuja tree will grow up fast for sure.”

“It will gain the strength to become a Tree of Life.”

Now, everyone’s faces were earnestly wanting me to use these flames for the Thuja tree.

I blew the two flames of life into the Thuja tree.

“Ahhh!”

“It is overflowing with energy!”

“It is full of the strength of life!”

“I can sense it bubbling up to grow.”

“It is an incredible power of nature!”

The refugees were in a frenzy.

I was not sure, but in the elves' eyes, the effect of the flame of life must be visible to them. Must be because they are elves.

I spoke.

“If I blow two flames of life into it every day like so, in no time at all, it will develop into a Tree of Life. Already, the Maple Tree Village and Pine Tree Village have been grown that way.”

“Thank you so much!”

“I know understand the reason you brought us here.”

“I can't believe we are getting another Tree of Life!”

“Thank you so much!”

And so, the 42 elf refugees that Cob's team brought were left at the Thuja village to gain their footing.

The Thuja Tree Village was formed.

A month passed and as expected, the Thuja tree developed into a Tree of Life.

The elves of the Thuja village were extremely happy and even the elves of the other villages visited and held a celebration.

A total of 4 villages were on the Brown Mountain now. Now the Brown Mountain was the most powerful and firm base of the elves.

Now no one can invade this place.

There were only 2 months left of the 6th exam's time period.

‘It probably won't make much difference if I just spend the remaining 2 months just hanging out but...’

But I don't do that.

There was still something I haven't settled yet.

Two months, that would be plenty of time to resolve it, a simple job.

I go to the eldest mother and said.

“I have somewhere I must go for a while.”

“Where are you going to go?”

Asked the eldest mother in surprise.

“I have to go to the forest of the dead.”

“In the west..... you mean where the lycanthropes are located.”

“Yes.”

Indeed.

The silver clan.

Leon Silver!

The time has come for me to enact my revenge.

They will have heard by now that Baron Bastian has been destroyed by Odin.

The dark magicians have been defeated, the last remaining enemy to the elves are the silver clan.

“While I have been here, I have become stronger. I now wish to put an end to our ill-fated relationship.”

“Won’t it be too dangerous by yourself?”

“For when I camp at night, it would be enough if I could have one warrior with me.”

“You just need one warrior?”

“Yes.”

I don't know what she's thinking but the eldest mother smiled.

“Just wait a second.”

“Yes.”

“Honey~!”

“..... huh?”

In a little bit,

“At most, two days will be plenty. Let's go.”

Derrick would be my company.

I somehow felt like I'm using a cheat code for beating a stage 1 boss monster. How to put it, the tension of revenge has drastically decreased.

I used the Divine Protection of the Wind to run with Derrick. We quickly made it out of Brown Mountain and entered the forest of the dead.

As soon as we stepped into the forest, I vividly remembered the memories of that day.

Yes, this is the road. The road where I ran like mad. If I keep going straight.....

My heart began to pound.

‘Hye-su!’

We get near to the spot where Hye-su died and Kang Cheon-sung was left alone to fight Leon Silver. A few steps further was the spot where Jun-ho died.

Are their bodies still there?

The fear started to creep in and suffocated my breath.

I stopped walking and spoke.

“What is it?”

“Just a moment.”

“Alright.”

Derrick sat on a boulder to rest.

I went blank where I stood.

I’m scared.

I think I’ll go crazy from the fear.

‘Should I back out now?’

The idea of giving up seduces me.

‘Okay. What use would that be now?’

Mere lycanthropes.....

The silver clan doesn’t pose a threat anymore, and it is just the past. Doing this won’t bring back the ones who died!

‘Alright, let’s just go back.....’

‘No. I think not seeing the corpses and just passing this by would be worse.’

My head became pure white. The memories kept getting rooted up in my head.

‘Did those people really die, what happened to their bodies, are they alive and playing us.... Those thoughts won’t go away. Don’t you agree, Hyun-ho?’ – I think this is a flashback memory from something Hye-su said.

‘Right.’

I realized that I haven’t grown at all.

That Kim Hyun-ho from then is just like now, the same and hadn’t grown a single bit.

‘So, let’s go together.’

Alright, let’s go, Hye-su.

‘Let’s verify that they died and properly dispose of them. I’m too scared alone, but I think it’ll be okay if I go with you, Hyun-ho.’

Let’s go together.

I'll be strong.

Even though I'm scared, I will put one foot ahead of the other.
Because that's how I'll grow.

I take a step. Derrick, who had been resting, walked beside me again.

We arrived at that spot.

..... there was nothing in the spot.

Neither Hye-su, nor Kang Cheon-sung was there.

I walk a little further and I cannot see Jun-ho's body either.

‘Where are they?’

The Guider skill doesn't show me anything either.

Kang Cheon-sung, Lee Hye-su, and Lee Jun-ho, it does not tell me where they are.

Is it because they are not alive? Or is it because they don't exist in this world?

Considering the courage this took the results were disappointing and I felt defeated.

“Is there something you are looking for?”

Asked Derrick.

“No.”

I started to talk again.

The thing the guider skill showed me was one thing.

“Let’s go. I think I know where Leon Silver is.”

“Okay.”

We faced southeast and moved. The cooldown time had ended so I used the Divine Protection of the Wind again to run alongside Derrick and we reached our destination in an instant.

After racing at the speed of lightning, a well moonlit hill began to appear.

“I can feel it.”

Derrick looked up towards the hill and pulled out both his

swords.

I too summoned my Neilson H2 guns and spoke.

“I have a request.”

“What is it?”

“Please leave Leon Silver to me.”

“I will.”

Derrick’s body flew forward.

“I just have to kill everyone but the strongest one.”

He was correct.

Chapter 92 – The End (Part 2)

The Silver clan was in a slumped state.

At the bottom of the hill, the leader of the Silver clan was sitting on a boulder like a king, Leon Silver was emitting a chilly air.

All the lycanthropes were being wary of his gaze and couldn't make a noise.

Leon Silver's thoughts were quite complicated.

‘How could there be such a strong human?’

There was one.

Even now when he recalled that human, he got a feeling that he had never felt before from any opponent.

It was terror.

‘Did they call him the Count of Wolfenbrooke?’

The Count of Wolfenbrooke, Odin.

That inhuman monster, with overwhelming strength, ruled the battlefield.

The Silver clan that allied with Baron Bastian, transformed into humans and fought stealthily on the battlefield.

Even in their transformed to human states, feeble humans could be killed without trouble.

As payment for their cooperation, the prisoners caught in battle, after de-weaponizing them, were sent into the forest and repopulated the human ranch.

And if the war was won, the next target would be the Brown Mountain elves.

The Brown Mountain was his target since he was young.

That was because of his father.

It was an old story, since about 20 years ago.

The young son that had all grown up, Leon, challenged his father to a fight to be the head of the family. The position was taken from his father and, as the defeated, his father took his group and left the territory.

But not many months after he had left, his father returned. Having lost all of his group, he returned alive alone.

“The only place for us to live is this forest here.”

His father always said that until his death, emphasizing that a safe existence was only possible in this forest. He said that only this place was allowed for the lycanthropes.

That provoked the hot-blooded Leon Silver.

‘For the safety of our Silver clan, we have to stay planted in this forest?’

Are the Brown Mountain elves that scary?

So much so that us valiant lycanthrope cannot even begin to defeat them?

From that moment on, Leon Silver’s dream started.

Coincidentally, refugees came pouring into the forest from Baron Bastian’s territory.

That was when Leon Silver had the idea to grow the size of his family.

That was the human ranch.

After that event, he changed into his human form and wandered

Bastian's territory and dragged humans back into the forest.

In preparation for possibly fighting an elf, he gathered any usable human weapons as well.

With the plentiful food as the foundation for the Silver clan, it grew, and the petition for cooperation came from Baron Bastian.

They had the joint goal of targeting the elves and Leon Silver gladly accepted the offer.

It was good up to there.

But there was something Leon Silver had overlooked.

He had not even considered the idea that there would be someone stronger than he.

He was born the strongest, and was the unparalleled strong leader Leon Silver, and his arrogance was obvious.

That was when he met Odin on the battlefield.

Aura Master.

The long sword he wielded had a blue energy emitted from it like waves, then it made an explosion and in an instant 1/3 of his clan

was killed.

Leon Silver felt fear for the first time in his life and he immediately ran and returned to the forest.

‘The humans I met about 2 years ago were nothing.’

The spirit summoner who used a strange long-distance weapon and the strong lad who used some odd martial arts.

Especially the martial artist that fought with him until the end gave him a deep wound, he had been the strongest human he had ever met.

He thought, oh a human can be this strong.

He thought well that’s it.

A complete misjudgment.

That was nothing.

A human, as it turns out, can become a monster like Count Odin of Wolfenbrooke.

There was not just weak humans like there were at the human ranch.

‘Baron Bastian won’t be able to defeat him, and if he falls, the next is us...!’

Leon Silver became restless.

A guy that was a monster like Odin, as soon as the war was over, would bring his army to kill him.

He sent an army before to suppress the Silver clan. This time too, he won’t let them off.

‘Should we run?’

It seemed wasteful since the restoration of the human ranch with the captured war prisoners was already in place.

But if that monstrous Odin comes for them, they’re finished.

‘Okay, we’ll run and hide deep in the forest. First, go into the center of the forest and steal the red apes’ territory and settle there for now.’

The easiest target were the red apes.

After that, if Odin hunts them down to there, he could run deeper into the forest.

Leon Silver thought that if they did that, they won't chase him that relentlessly.

But actually, Leon Silver had no idea that a different enemy, not Odin, would come for them.

Kwakwakwakwang-!

“Kuang!”

“Kuek!”

It was like a stone falling from the middle of the sky. No, not a stone, an incredible flame.

Hwalululu-!

The flame spread in all directions and in an instant, it enveloped the lycanthropes of the Silver clan.

“What, what is this!”

At the shocking and sudden scene before him, Leon Silver jumped up in alarm.

Looking closely, from the center of the tsunami of flames, there

appeared to be a figure.

With a slender build and wielding two swords. And from those swords came the deathly flames.

And pointed ears.....

“An elf?!”

“Right.”

The flames suddenly stopped.

When the flames stopped, the red smoke dissipated and an unbearable horror could be seen!

The only lycanthrope alive from the Silver clan was just Leon Silver.

Everyone else were merely heaps of ash.

Propagating for nearly 20 years in order to grow to its current size, all the children of the Silver clan were killed in an instant.

And the one responsible for it was the target he was aiming for, an elf.

Just one elf!

“Ah, ahhh...!”

Leon Silver could not come to his senses from the shock.

How futile could all this be?

It was a horror that seems unreal.

How could one elf have completed such destruction in the blink of an eye?

Everything of his became ash from the fire in a few seconds!

“Are you Leon Silver?”

“That, that I am!”

Stricken with fear, Leon Silver was barely able to give an answer.

He was no longer the ruler of this forest, nor the top of the food chain, any longer.

Before his eyes was an absolute slayer and in front of that he was a nothing, a weakling.

“You were looking for a chance to get at us elves. How does it feel? To see the true power of the elves.”

“That is.....”

“Does it look like if you got stronger and stronger that you would have been able to defeat us?”

“Ahhh....!”

Leon Silver was unable to say anything.

How did he, born the strongest of them all, become such a weak being?

After seeing Odin in the battlefield, fear struck him yet again here.

“Why is it that you and humans do not know how to be content. Did he not teach you anything, your father who barely escaped my hands?”

Only now did he recall the advice of his dead father.

‘He should have!’

Leon Silver suddenly felt so angry.

‘He should have told me before! That they were this strong, he should have told me!’

Leon Silver did not consider how his short temper and ambition drove him not to use his ears to listen to wise advice.

“But the foe you must battle is not me. Go on.”

With that, the old elf turned his back.

Leon Silver was confused.

‘Then who?’

Then.

Piercing through the black smoke, a human appeared.

“Been a long time?”

The human looked him straight in the eyes.

Leon Silver recognized him right away.

The human he lost before.

As it turns out – the fear was just a memory.

That was what I realized when I reunited with Leon Silver.

Seeing the fear that struck Leon Silver from the unbelievable performance from Derrick, seeing that, it makes it hard to fear him anymore.

“Been a long time?”

I say.

“You.....”

“So you do remember me? That’s a relief.”

On Leon’s face, the hostility was clear.

“You involved the elves.”

“Well, I guess you could say that.”

I pointed the Neilson H2 at Leon Silver.

“Now, avoid it.”

“What?”

Tang!

The instant it fired, Leon Silver deftly ducked to his left.

The bullet in the gun moves close to the speed of sound so it cannot be that he as listening to the sound to avoid it.

It can also be said that upon seeing the spark, that it would be too late to react.

Leon Silver is reacting to my finger pulling the trigger and moving based on that.

“You’re good.”

“Damn you!”

“Dodge this too.”

This time, I shot with the double guns.

Taang-

“Kuhuk!”

Leon Silver was shot in his side and moaned.

He reacted well and dodged one but with the other gun, I anticipated his movement and fired.

Within 10 m.

Thanks to the shooting skill, my accuracy is 100%.

Aiming for where he will dodge to and firing two shots, there was no way he could avoid it.

“You!”

Leon Silver came barreling towards me.

“Divine Protection of the Wind!”

I used the Divine Protection of the Wind and jumped safely into the air.

I lightly somersaulted over Leon's head and shot at his shoulder with the gun in my left hand.

Tang-

“Kuk!”

As he was shot in the right shoulder, Leon Silver stumbled.

“Kuahhhh!”

Having landed behind him, Leon Silver turned his whole body and swiped with his left hand. His sharp nails nearly pierced me.

“Teleport.”

Pat!

In an instant I was behind Leon Silver's back.

Tang!

“Kuk!”

Shooting him in the left knee, he buckled and Leon Silver kneeled.

“Kuah! I’m going to kill you-!”

I wielded both guns in response.

I knocked his left hand away and intercepted his right hand with a guard. Then I twisted my left wrist and pulled the trigger.

Tang!

“Kuk!”

Leon Silver was shot in his right wrist.

In desperation, he swung his left hand but once again I guarded against it and with the same movement, shot his left shoulder.

Tang-

“Kuk!”

The effect of training on the mu ren zhuang appeared together with the intermediate level 2 reflex skill.

My physical strength was at intermediate level 5 so in comparison with Leon Silver, I was not lacking in strength or reflexes.

It was a body that was at the limits of an elf's body so of course this was the case.

Having been shot up here and there, his body was a mess. Leon Silver could not stand any longer and collapsed onto the floor.

He was able to make it this far because he was a lycanthrope, if he had been a human, he would have died multiple times over by now.

“How... how did you.....”

As he was dying, Leon Silver had a face of disbelief.

“Humans normally grow pretty fast.”

“Kuk, you fucking.....”

When I placed the gun on his forehead, Leon Silver had a resigned look on his face.

Before I killed him, I asked.

“What did you do to my friends?”

“I killed them.”

“Their bodies.”

“I don’t know.”

Even in this midst, Leon Silver smiled.

“If it is not fresh food, I don’t eat it.”

“..... okay. Then it’s time for you to sleep. Forever.”

Tang!

A red hole was made in his forehead.

Leon Silver died, just like that, with his eyes wide open. His lips, curved up in a smile, made me feel like he did that to upset me.

‘I guess the bodies of examinees disappear. Thank goodness.’

I felt some relief knowing that they weren’t in the bellies of some lycanthropes.

“If you are finished, let us return. We should be back by midday tomorrow.”

At Derrick's words, I nodded my head.

"Yes, let's go back."

I left the hill together with Derrick.

My revenge was finally complete.

Chapter 93 – What Happened When I Got Back (Part 1)

In the time left in the Arena, I made the flames of life and spent the time leisurely playing the violin.

I sent the two flames of life to the Maple Tree Village and the Thuja Tree Village. Because of it, the two trees were growing well and all those in the villages were happy.

When I surpassed the Suzuki violin book 6, my skill level increased by a level.

-Reflex (synthesis skill): Knowing how to move your body

*Intermediate level 3: Obtain godlike athletic and reflex abilities

When my level increased by just one, my violin playing skills suddenly greatly increased as well.

With my violin playing improving smoothly every single day, my elf audience grew too.

And when the exam time period was nearly up, another happy result happened.

-Spirit summons (main skill): summon spirits and obtain the power of nature.

*Spirits that can be summoned: Sylph, Kasa

*Entry level 7: summons time 3 hours 30 minutes

I spent my time in the Tree of Life so the spirit summons increased again!

‘This time, I barely raised it one in a whole year.’

I don’t know how many years it will take to raise it to the next level.

It seems impossible now to increase the spirit summons level for free by using the Tree of Life.

That’s because I don’t think the next, the 7th exam, will be one where I can leisurely spend years with the elves.

‘It might be that in the next exam, I will have to say goodbye to the elves.’

Looking at the flow of the exams thus far, in context, the next

exam will have to do with those dark magicians, I'm sure of it.

‘Did he say his name was John Omento?’

He was a part of an organization.

Thus, an unknown and suspicious group was planning nefarious things.

Thankfully, I met John Omento the necromancer, so I can use the guider skill to point me in the direction that I need to go in.

‘If I had my way, I would want to just stay here but that can't be helped.’

As the exam time end neared, I felt sadness.

-Name: Kim Hyun-ho

-Class: 16

-Karma: 0

Mission: protect the elves on Brown Mountain (Achieved)

-Time limit: 31 seconds

Pat!

When the time limit was up, the exam door appeared before me.

‘It’s finally over!’

I need to hurry home and first, see Min-jeong. With this sprightly body I have starved 12 months!

I quickly entered the exam door and the baby angel greeted me.

“You aren’t going to blow your horn today?”

“I don’t have a hobby of greeting men in heat with a horn.”

“Smart. Well, I guess I should check the results first. Summon board.”

-Name: Kim Hyun-ho

-Class: 21

-Karma: +5,100

-Mission: rest until the next exam

-Time limit: 100 days

For a second, I grew suspicious of my own eyes.

“Hey, is this right? It’s not an error is it?”

“If we are talking about errors, your role is an error.”

“Wow-! Nice!!”

I raised both arms and rejoiced.

Look at that frightful amount of karma! Look at how the class leaped from a 16 to a 21!

This is how much I achieved in my 6th exam!

This exam too, I didn’t do much and it made me wonder if this prize is okay.

“You were told to protect the elves but you practically revived them. You made 3 more elf villages as well, that was some good

thinking.”

“I am so good.”

“You formed an alliance with the count of Wolfenbrooke and annihilated the Silver clan and eliminated future trouble. Looking at all those achievements, it would have been okay to even get more than this.”

“Then give me more.”

I said unashamedly.

“Wow, you are so shameless. But did I not say? That how hard you work also plays into the grade.”

“Are you saying I didn’t work hard?”

“Well, then, did you?”

“..... that depends.”

“Don’t lie. And you did raise your spirit summons and gained other benefits so be happy with that. Honestly, even for an examinee like Odin, getting that much karma after clearing an exam is hard.”

“Really?”

“Now now, if you’re all done with your business here, go on back. Facing a man in heat, I feel like I’m gonna to get pregnant.”

“Why don’t you make such bad jokes after you take that wee bundegi off?”

I walked out through the exam door that appeared in thin air.

11 am.

I woke up in the hotel room I stayed in the night of the exam.

I checked my smartphone and there were two texts.

[Cutie wife <3: It’s a good morning here~! Have a good day at work!]

[Cutie wife <3: Wahh..... no reply ;(Is it cuz you’re on the plane?
🐶]

Min-jeong thinks I have gone abroad on a business trip and won’t be back until this morning.

I should reply now.

[Me: I just arrived at Incheon Airport. I miss you.]

She should be at work now but the reply comes in a few seconds.

[Cutie wife <3: me too 📱]

[Me: How dare a new employee use her phone at work? You aren't working are you.]

[Cutie wife <3: 😡 Hmph, I'm just taking a quick break.]

[Me: ok work hard.]

[Cutie wife <3: you aren't going to say I should just quit?]

Here she starts again.

I send her an appropriate response.

[Me: 🖐]

[Cutie wife <3: 📱 Hmph!!]

[Me: I love you too.]

[Cutie wife <3: Well, I don't like you!]

[Me: And I said I love you too.]

[Cutie wife <3: hahahaha]

[Me: hahahaha]

Ah, sending texts like this, I could feel myself calming down.

[Cutie wife <3: Btw oppa, I'm going to be late today.]

[Me:]

[Cutie wife <3: some friends I met from cooking school, we're meeting up. You want to come to?]

I let out a deep sigh.

[Me: I'm tired so I can't. Have fun.]

[Cutie wife <3: I'm so sorry! But when I get home ♥ okay? ♥ <3]

[Me: If you come home past 10, I'll be upset.]

[Cutie wife <3: aww, until 11, okay?]

[Me: do what you want.]

[Cutie wife <3: wahhhh 😞]

Min-jeong sent all kinds of emoticons and was being cute. I think maybe, I'll forgive her, when.

[Cutie wife <3: I'll grant one wish, whatever you want.]

[Me: Anything?]

[Cutie wife <3: Yes, anything <3]

[Me: okay, remember you said anything, okay?]

[Cutie wife <3: okay ☺]

My peeved-ness dissipates easily.

[Me: go and have lots of fun. No, want me to pick you up when you're done?]

[Cutie wife <3: You suddenly changed! What are you going to have me do --]

[Me: It's nothing really, it's just that it has come time to show off my amazing prowess.]

[Cutie wife <3: hahahaha that again hahaha]

I whistled while I checked out the hotel and left. My exam grades and other things, this day is going great.

When I have returned home, I focus on how I was going to use the karma prize.

“Show me all my skills.”

-Now showing all skills that examinee Kim Hyun-ho has acquired.

-Main skill: spirit summons (entry level 7).

-Assist skill: physical strength buff (intermediate level 5), guider (entry level 1), and teleport (entry level 4).

-Special skill: skill synthesis

-Synthesis skill: Divine Protection of the Wind (entry level 5), Divine Protection of Fire (entry level 1), reflex (intermediate level 3), flame of life (intermediate level 2), transmission (entry

level 1), space bag (entry level 4), shooting (entry level 1).

-Remaining karma: +5,100

“How much do I need to raise my spirit summons to intermediate level 1?”

I focused on spirit summons, which I realized was very important this past time.

At my question, the board began to move its letters.

-Spirit summons (main skill) to raise to intermediate level 1 showing the karma needed.

-Spirit summons (main skill) summon an intermediate spirit and possess the power of nature, absorb the energy of the surrounding nature into the body.

-Summonable spirits: Sylph, Kasa

-Intermediate level 1: summons time 5 hours

-Raising to intermediate level 1 will use 5,100 karma

-Remaining karma: +5,100

‘This thing is a ghost.’

How does it know I have 5,100 karma!

As expected of a main skill, raising it to intermediate level 1 would use a large sum of karma.

But it does seem to be worth it as well.

Even without summoning a spirit, it is because I could use the energy of nature from my body.

‘This completely explains how Derrick is able to run faster than me.’

This also makes it clear how losing a Tree of Life makes the elves weaker.

A body that grows strong with the power of nature.

That specialty of the elves, if I can get an intermediate spirit summons, I can do it too.

The effect I gained would not be just that.

Divine Protection of the Wind.

Divine Protection of Fire.

These two skills also receive strength from the spirit summons. If the spirit summons goes to intermediate level 1, the strength of those two skills will also increase.

‘What about raising my reflex skill?’

From this past 6th exam, I practiced the violin all year long and the reflex skill barely went up by one.

I think it will continue to be near impossible to raise the reflex skill through training alone.

‘Ah, this is a dilemma!’

I grabbed my head and thought and thought, and the skills I want to raise are more than just a few.

But it was impossible to satisfy my greed.

I made a decision.

“I will raise my spirit summons to intermediate level 1!”

I was now, already, a 6th turn examinee. I was looking ahead to the 7th exam.

Having already butt heads with the suspicious dark magic organization, the best tactic to be used when fighting them would be the spirit summons.

‘Because dark magic and the power of nature are opposites.’

Last time, while fighting the skinny middle aged necromancer John Omento, I realized this.

-Raising spirit summons (main skill) to intermediate level 1 with 5,100 karma.

Pat!

The light coming from the board washed over my body.

-Remaining karma: 0

“Whew.”

Seeing the remaining karma go to 0 made me sigh.

This was the feeling of sadness of a worker that lived paycheck to paycheck seeing his money just pass through his bank account.

Anyway, when the spirit summons raised to intermediate level, something changed inside my body too.

I could feel a strange energy flowing through my body.

‘Is this the power of nature?’

It was warm and felt good and I got the sense it is a good energy.

Because I did not choose aura control as my main skill, my body was still currently at the physical strength buff intermediate level 5, but I can become better with the power of nature.

‘An advanced spirit summons, when compared to Odin’s aura master, won’t lose!’

Derrick showed that to me.

He joined himself with an advanced spirit and had the abilities of a powerful spirit!

At that level, even if my body lagged behind, there was plenty of potential to surpass that limit.

‘I should research more ways to use the shooting and spirit summons together.’

I planned on thinking it over carefully for a while. Since this rest period is 100 days.

[Cutie wife <3: Oh, I made some kimchi jjigae at home.]

After I received the message, I became very hungry.

The elves didn’t eat meat so I too, for 1 year, had to be vegetarian.

‘I hope it has lots of meat in it.’

I looked at the kimchi jjigae left on the gas stovetop.

Inside, the jjigae was half kimchi, half pork.

[Me: Is this a kimchi [jjigae](#) or a pork jjigae?]

(TN: Jjigae translates to stew)

[Cutie wife <3: And that upsets you?]

[Me: You're incredible.]

[Cutie wife <3: haha]

I took out a mountain sized heap of brown rice from the rice pot and ate it with the kimchi jjigae like a beast.

The first time I've had meat in a year! I thought I would go crazy from the taste.

Chapter 94 – What Happened When I Got Back (Part 2)

‘Why haven’t I heard from her?’

The time had passed by and it was now past 10 pm. Even so, there was no word from Min-jeong.

‘She’s not a kid or anything, nothing wrong with her staying late to drink but.....’

I had told her that I would come pick her up and not hearing back by now left a bad taste in my mouth.

I sent her a text.

[Me: you having fun? When should I come get you?]

Just then, I got a phone call from Min-jeong.

“Hello? You in Cheonan?”

-Hehe, my honey! Were you waiting eagerly for me to call? Aww baby.

Hmm, yup, this was her drunk voice.

“I was waiting eagerly.”

-Whhhhy? Why?

“Cuz I miss you.”

-Hehehe, you missed me? Aww, booboo, I know!

“Where are you?”

-Hehe, my handsome honey.

“..... I am good looking.”

-Lots of money and a good body and a handsome face, my baby has got it all!

“Okay, okay, your rich pushover boyfriend oppa is here.”

-Hehehehehe!

Min-jeong giggled loudly. She's way beyond drunk.

“Where are you, Min-jeong.”

-This is Arpeggio.

“Arpeggio? Where is that?”

-Arpeggio is..... Arpeggio, hehe!”

It’s probably the name of a bar.

“Is it in Cheonan?”

-Yup!

“I’ll come now, wait there.”

-Hehe, my baby’s coming to get me. I was missing him but he’s coming here. Hehehe.

‘Wow.’

After I hung up the phone, I changed my clothes and went down to the parking garage.

I search for “Arpeggio in Cheonan” in my GPS and there was indeed a bar named that.

How could she drink herself into such oblivion! Some guy could just pick her up and take her.

I followed the highway and raced over. I think I probably should have gotten a couple speeding tickets.

Oh, I had forgot. My car is a good car. It's an SUV so the outside doesn't look that luxurious but everyone always takes notice because it is a Porsche.

‘That's right, Min-jeong's friends will be there too. How do I look?’

I glanced over my outfit. I just threw stuff on but it wasn't bad.

They were the clothes that the stewardess Lee Soo-hyun had picked out for me in Copenhagen.

After coming into so much money, even at the basic level I was still buying expensive and good things so no matter what I wore, I would always look pretty good.

More than anything, now that my body is so athletic and buff, no matter what it is, everything looks good.

‘This is more than good enough.’

I complimented myself as I drive towards the bar.

With my guider skill, I was able to find Min-jeong easily.

But.....

‘What the hell is that guy?’

I was at a loss for words.

Isn’t this just a drinking party? Where are all the friends?

A guy that looks like he barely just turned 20 was lending his shoulder to Min-jeong and was just sitting there.

‘What kind of situation was this?’

It was even more maddening because he was tall and handsome.

To have to see a thing like this when it has been a year since I have reunited with Min-jeong.

“Oh, are you Min-jeong noona’s boyfriend?”

The young man seemed to recognize me and asked me.

He looked over to Min-jeong resting on his shoulder and seemed embarrassed by it.

“I’m sorry. It’s just she is quite drunk.”

“Where is everyone?”

I was so baffled by it all, that’s what I asked after some silence.

“They all left already.”

“Oh? I see.”

I took Min-jeong’s arms. I tried to shake her shoulders and rouse her awake but she wouldn’t wake up.

I tsk tsk-ed her and piggy backed her.

“We’ll be going.”

I said a light farewell but then.

The young man grabbed a hold of me.

“Hold on please.”

“Yes?”

I was already in a bad mood and the annoyance could be heard in my voice.

The young man looked like he was thinking something then said.

“I’ve heard a lot about you. I heard you have a lot of money and are very well off.”

“Oh really?”

“You drive a nice car and all the clothes and shoes you’re wearing are luxury brand labels, you’re good looking, you must have lots of girls around you.”

What’s this dick trying to get at?

“So? What do you want me to do about it?”

Now my voice could no longer stay amicable.

“If your feelings aren’t sincere, could you give up Min-jeong noona to me?”

“What?”

“I am being very sincere right now. I like her so much I think I’ll go crazy. I know that is no excuse but I beg you, please.”

He said that and gave a 90 degree bow at the hip, it was quite a

scene.

I was so flustered, I just looked at him.

“Hey.”

“Yes.”

“You seem like you’ve always had people tell you that you are nice and respectful and well mannered. Your looks are good and you probably got lots of love growing up.”

I kept talking to the confused young man.

“But pretending to be that nice, that respectful, that desperately in love, did you think saying those things would make me forgive you?”

“.....?!”

The young man’s face became frozen.

“You want me to guess more? Did you expect that after something like this I would get in a big fight with Min-jeong and we would break up? Lending your shoulder to a girl who’s already taken, you guys sure made a pretty picture. You wanna die?”

“Ah, no, I was just.....!”

“If I see you again, I’ll rip your mouth right out of your face.”

I stared at him head on and the young man’s face turned white.

He seemed like a gentle kid, how disappointing. If he was even a bit of a douche he would have picked a fight with me. In which case, I would have beat the shit out of him.

I asked for the bill at the counter and was told that the friends who left already paid it.

I put Min-jeong in the passenger seat and put the seat belt on her.

I turned on the car and angrily slammed on the pedal. The car is good and sped up in a few seconds.

My insides were bubbling and it was hard to stay calm.

‘How am I supposed to handle this?’

A guy like that was lingering around her? And she went out drinking with him?

I glanced over at Min-jeong.

She had no idea how I was feeling and was just sleeping peacefully. She looked pretty even when she was sleeping and it just made me angrier.

I came back after a year and in my absence, that guy shows up.

And suddenly I exploded in laughter.

I laughed hard.

‘What the fuck am I doing?’

Why am I getting so worked up and upset over dating?

I was in a war with lots of lives at stake and even returned after getting revenge for my dead friends.

Only after doing all of that did I get a rest period of 100 days, so why!

Compared to that, this wasn’t even much of a problem so why was I getting so stressed!

I couldn’t handle how angry this was making me.

I took out my smartphone and called Hyun-ji.

-Hey, oppa, what's up?

“Let Min-jeong sleep at your place tonight.”

-Why?

“I don't want to see her.”

-Why are you being like that..... did something happen?

“She was passed out drunk and the guy she was with asked me to let him have her.”

-Oh shit.

“I'm heading to you now.”

-Oh, okay.

I dropped Min-jeong off at Hyun-ji's studio that was close to my place.

“You okay, oppa?”

“Yeah.”

“You don’t look okay.”

“Nah. I’m just annoyed is all. It’s tiresome. What’s the point.”

“But still oppa, calm down. Min-jeong isn’t the type to cheat.”

“I know that too.”

“If you know, you should let it slide.”

“Why do I have to hold in that kind of stress while I date? Is dating that important?”

“.....”

“Never mind. I’m going.”

“Mm.”

I returned home and haphazardly threw my clothes off and laid down in bed.

**

“Oooh, oppa.”

Min-jeong turned around in bed and reflexively cuddled into the arms of the person next to her.

But the sudden female voice she heard...

“Eww gross, bitch. Who are you calling oppa?”

“.....?”

Min-jeong eyes shot open.

With an empty stare, she looked at Hyun-ji.

Having come out of Hyun-ji’s embrace, Min-jeong clumsily looked around.

What came into view was a studio that was a little less than 400 square feet.

“Where is this?”

“My room, where else.”

“Why am I here?”

“Oppa dropped you off here and left.”

“Hyun-ho oppa?”

“You got a different oppa?”

Only then did Min-jeong remember.

“Oh, right! Did I call oppa?”

“He said you did. That’s probably why he went to pick you up.”

Min-jeong quickly took out her smartphone and checked her call history.

Thankfully, there was a call record of her and hyun-ho. But seeing that, Min-jeong was confused.

“But why did oppa drop me off here?”

Hyun-ji just made tsk tsk noises at her.

“You don’t remember anything?”

“Well, I drank too much.....”

“Tsk tsk, I thought you were curbing your drinking lately but you

friggin' drank till you blacked out."

"It was the last day with the cooking academy people..... but what happened? Why didn't oppa take me home and instead left me here?"

"You fucked up, girl."

"What? How?"

Min-jeong looked scared. What mistake did she make?

"Who is the guy you were alone with?"

"A-alone with?"

"That's what he said. When he got there, there were no friends, just you and the guy."

"What, what do you mean. Everyone else had left?"

"Yep."

"Oh shit, what do I do! So what happened?"

"He asked oppa to give you up. Who is that improper guy?"

Min-jeong face lost all color.

“What do I do! Is oppa really mad?”

“He must be really mad if he left you here.”

“Um, how mad?”

“He said it’s all very tiresome. He said he doesn’t know what it’s all for. He said dating isn’t so important to him that he would be willing to bear this kind of stress for. If you play this wrong, you’ll lose everything at once.”

Min-jeong was scared.

Min-jeong hurried and got dressed.

“Where are you going, at this hour?”

“I have to go home!”

“It’s dawn right now.”

“Doesn’t matter, I have to go! It’ll be too late if I don’t get there and beg right now!”

“So you do know. Want me to call you a taxi?”

“Yeah!”

Hyun-ji made a call and gets a taxi.

Min-jeong was anxious and didn't know what to do and kept asking Hyun-ji if oppa was really mad.

“It would be a good thing is he was just mad. Then you can appease him.”

“But?”

“He looked like he was sick of it and just wanted to call it quits.”

“Oh my God! What am I going to do! I'm totally screwed!”

“Well who told you it'd be a good idea to around flirting? Were you still doing that here and there?”

“It's not like that!”

Min-jeong shouted, on the verge of tears.

“My cooking school friends just were pranking me for fun! Oh my God, what am I going to do!”

“What do you mean, if begging doesn’t work, that’s it.”

“Are you going to keep talking like that just cuz this isn’t you?”

Min-jeong let out her anger too.

Hyun-ji asked in a surprised voice.

“Were you guys that serious?”

“Yes! Did it look like I was fooling around with Hyun-ho oppa to you?”

“Yeah, that’s how you’ve always been. Isn’t that all stuff oppa knew too before he dated you?”

At those words, Min-jeong went blank.

Because of this, that was how Hyun-ho might start seeing her now too.

Hyun-ho liked girls that were demure and well behaved. That was why Min-jeong looked to Hyun-ho while she tried hard and gained his trust.

Because Hyun-ho knew she used to go around with Hyun-ji to

play around, she tried so hard to absolve herself of that image.

But because of this one incident, she might lose all her efforts in an instant.

As soon as the taxi arrived, Min-jeong frantically sped over.

Chapter 95 – What Happened When I Got Back (Part 3)

The morning light that peeped through my curtains woke me up. Behind my back, I could feel a familiar warmth and touch.

I wonder when she got back.

Min-jeong was holding me tight from behind and was asleep.

‘She came.’

It seems that as soon as she got her wits about her when she woke up at Hyun-ji’s, she quickly returned.

I approve of that kind of behavior and it got rid of some of the anger from last night.

But I can’t just let this go because of that.

I carefully loosened myself from her and got up. I got out the bedroom and tried to sleep some more in the guest room bed.

But then a while later,

Kik.

In that gap, Min-jeong woke up and came in and quietly laid down next to me.

Without saying anything, she inserted herself into my arms. I've done wrong, please forgive me, an expression full of aegyo.

“.....”

“.....”

We didn't say anything.

I couldn't quite grasp the words I was supposed to say.

The slightly heartless decisions I had been thinking of won't come out of my mouth.

Then Min-jeong says something.

“Oppa.”

“Yeah.”

“I messed up.”

“.....”

Min-jeong struck first.

“But please listen to my side. It’s not an excuse. I really am sorry. But please listen.”

“Okay.”

“That guy last night is 20 year old Kim Min-suk.”

“He’s young. Are you gonna to say you had no idea that a guy like that has a mad crush on you?”

Just you try and say you didn’t know. [A girl with noonchi](#) as keen as you would never not know.*

(TN: Used in an earlier chapter. Noonchi is the idea that you can read the mood. I don’t know that there is an English word that is equivalent to it. In Western terms, I guess it can be called emotional intelligence or considered something you would see in a high context culture.)

“I did know. I pretended not to.”

“And?”

“I pretended not to know but my cooking school friends kept trying to hook me up with him as a joke. They kept saying things like ‘I think he likes you, try calling him,’ stuff like that.”

“Those bitches.”

“That’s what I’m saying. Last night’s drinking party, they brought him to it without me knowing. I was flustered but that’s no excuse to just up and leave either so I just forced myself to stay.”

“Is that why you drank until you blacked out at a place where there was a guy that had crush on you was?”

“I’m sorry, oppa. It was the first time drinking in a while and I couldn’t gauge the amount I could drink. I won’t ever put it to my lips again.”

Min-jeong was asking for forgiveness for all the parts she had done wrong.

“But those girls just left you alone with him and took off?”

“I’m sure they did it all just for fun. I deleted all their numbers. I won’t ever hang out with them again.”

“Why on earth did they do that?”

“They’re probably jealous.”

“Jealous?”

“Last time when you came to pick me up, they were all really jealous. Not only that but Min-suk is really popular at the school too and he likes me so they probably chalked it up as a joke and did it.”

“Sounds about right.”

Just because they were jealous, they were going to break up another couple and call it a joke?

“Girls are just like that. Ji-hyun and Hyun-ji aren't like that which is why we they are close friends.”

Now that I hear it, it wasn't wrong that Min-jeong felt resentful and like she was wrongfully accused about this.

She had always tried to keep her distance with Kim min-suk and that melted my anger.

Aside from Min-jeong's heavy drinking last night, there wasn't really anything she did wrong.

‘Yeah, from her perspective, I can see how I made a big deal and got angry over a small issue.’

I had come back after an entire year.

I had been fighting for my life during that long period of time. And to come back and see everything that happened last night just infuriated me.

But for Min-jeong, we went from doing great all this time and suddenly our relationship was on the rocks in just a day.

“Min-jeong.”

“Yes, Oppa.”

“Do you think we just don’t mesh?”

At that, Min-jeong must have gotten nervous because she started hugging me tighter.

“I know you are trying hard to accommodate me and to match my preferences. How could I not know? But I can’t give you that same amount of attention.”

“That’s not true, oppa.”

“I can’t say but there are times now and again when I will have to leave for work. It is such hard work that I have to give it my all. That’s why.....”

“.....”

“So when I am back here, when I am with my girl, I just want to be happy and comfortable. I don’t want to worry and I don’t want to stress. I guess this makes me insincere and inconsiderate.”

“Don’t say that.”

“I feel you have to go through hardship because you have to match a person like me and I’m sorry.”

“I’m not suffering or anything like that. I have never felt disappointed in you, oppa.”

“..... Really?”

“Yes.”

Min-jeong wiggled over onto my other side and looked at me straight on.

“I won’t want for more. I’ll be happy just spending this time like we are. I’ll try harder. So that you’ll be more comfortable.”

That instant, Min-jeong’s eyes could not have looked prettier.

I met my lips to hers.

Upper lip, bottom lip, we kissed softly and I pulled her close. A

soft touch.

“Oppa.”

“Yeah.”

“The wish?”

“Wish?”

“Yesterday, you said anything.....I was so excited from looking forward to it.”

I exploded in laughter.

I laid her down and got on top of her.

“Do you know what my wish is?”

“What is it?”

“Not stopping.”

Min-jeong’s face grew a bright red. We kissed again and I took off her shirt.

“Until I am satisfied, I won’t stop for anything.”

“Do what you want oppa.”

Min-jeong’s eyes lit up as she hugged my neck.

I don’t know how long it was.

The curtains were closed and there was no clock, so I couldn’t tell where the sun was.

For that long while, so much so that even I felt tired, we made love.

Ding dong~

She must have been exhausted because Min-jeong, who had fallen asleep on my arm, woke up from the text alarm.

It must be a girl’s instinct.

Min-jeong reflexively grabbed the smartphone by her head.

“Who is it?”

“It’s Hyun-ji. She’s worried about me.”

“Tell her you’re okay.”

“Yeah.”

I don’t know what Min-jeong found to be so funny because she smiled giddily as she sent the text.

I peeked over at it.

[I lost my mind twice today heehee <3]

“Hold on, halt thy fingers!”

“Heehee!”

“[I said halt!](#)”

(TN: He was using old Korean and talking like a king would when giving orders)

But a girl’s fingers are like bolts of lightning. The message got sent.

“If, if you send a text like that.....!”

A moment later, I got a text from Hyun-ji.

[Hyun-ji: Woah, you're a genius]

“YAHH! Yoo Min-jeong! Come here!”

“Gyak, I'm sorry!”

“Is saying sorry just a habit for you?! The person on the other end is my baby sister! Are you two crazy! Are you!”

“Aww, oppa~.”

And like that, we bickered back and forth for a while.

And that's how the eventful 6th turn break started.

I decided to quit the violin lessons.

The teacher said I had talent and tried to convince me to not quit. But trying to raise my reflex skill with this would be impossible so I quit.

‘I should find a different method now.’

Should I try the piano?

I shook my head.

I'm done with the music now.

Seeing a note on a piece of paper just disgusts me. Music was never my style.

More than that, practicing martial arts that I can actually use seems like a better idea.

‘Hold on, why didn’t I think of this before?’

I suddenly thought of something.

‘I wonder if I can take guns like a rifle or grenade in the spacial storage.’

But the ingredients I used to create the storage space was teleport and the item bag.

If I could carry weapons like that in the item bag, the research center should have given me a grenade from the get go.”

“But the item bag and storage space are different skills. Should I try it?’

First, I called to Odin. He too should be back from the Arena by now.

-Mr. Kim Hyun-ho. How did your exam go?

Odin answered welcomingly.

“I cleared it perfectly.”

-Perfectly...you say. Seeing how you led the elves to victory, you must have received a grand prize.

“Yes, thanks to you.”

-That is a good thing. But what is it you have called about?

“I was wondering if you can put weapons like grenades into an item bag.”

-That is impossible.

“..... Is that so?”

-If that was possible, don't you think I would have put this and that away in the item bag since the beginning? Weapons and electronics can be stored in the item bag, but you cannot take them

out in the Arena.”

“Do you think it’s not allowed because it’s cheating?”

-I don’t think that we are allowed to break the order of civilization in the Arena by bringing in technology like that. Before, America tried to make a generator for the sun in the Arena and even though it was built there correctly, it did not work.

Such a thing happened?

It’s impressive that America even attempted such a feat.

“But it would be possible if I use karma to itemize it?”

-That would probably work but how much karma do you think it would take to itemize all the parts for a solar generator?

“Haha, I guess you’re right.”

Just imagining it made me cringe with how much karma that would cost.

If you could store it but that stuff could not be taken out in the Arena, then the storage space was probably not be able to be used that way either.

‘Loopholes definitely don’t work.’

There is no way around it. So it can’t be used with weapons, I have to make myself stronger.

-Sounds like you have lots to think about.

“Yes. I have to become stronger, no matter what.”

-You want to be stronger.....

I got the feeling Odin was mulling something over.

-You really want to be stronger?

“Of course.”

-Do you remember that when I first decided to help you, I received money?

“Yes.”

-But I wasn’t able to help you and in payment for that, I said pick an item that costed 1000 karma.

“I remember.”

-Why do you think the number was 1000 karma?

“Excuse me?”

I got a strange feeling.

When I think about what he just said, I do feel like I almost remembered something.

“Is there, perhaps, an examinee that sells karma for money?”

-Correct.

That’s what Odin meant.

The reason that it was 1000 karma!

That was the price of karma for 10M USD.

You can buy karma with money!

I had not thought of that before.

“Some may like money but still, there is an examinee that sells karma for money?”

-There is. But I didn't tell you this information. Same for Chairman Park Jin-seong. Why do you think that is?

“Why is that?”

-Examinees that sell their karma for money, those are people crazy only for money. Who do you think are people like that?

Something crossed my mind.

I remembered when Odin cursed them with a loud voice.

“The Chinese examinees?”

-You do remember. You are absolutely right. In their efforts to collect majeong, which is worth money, they are crazy people who even kill people in the Arena. Karma transactions usually have to be done with them. That is why I didn't mention it.

“.....”

-I didn't want you to have to interact with such poor characters.

“I understand.”

-But if you really want to work with them, I will arrange a

meeting for you.

“You, Odin, personally?”

-If I am on the other side of the table, they won't dare to try anything. Also, I don't want to divulge your identity to those Chinese bastards.

“The flames of life?”

-Yes. That is what I am most worried about. A skill that can save a person's life can make a lot of money. There is no way they wouldn't make a play for you.

Odin was right.

If they are crazy people that kill humans to collect majeong, they are more than capable of such crimes.

-I am worried nonetheless. It is oddly widely known in the Arena community that Chairman Park Jin-seong searched high and low for a cure for his disease. And now Chairman Park Jin-seong has publicly made a full recovery. So what do you think everyone that knows about that is thinking?

“.....”

Chapter 96 – Karma Transaction

Odin continued to say.

-It is already known that someone cured Chairman Park Jinseong. But there are only a few people who know that that person is you.

The only other person that knew this fact was Odin.

But I was sure the Korean Arena research center had their suspicions and probably already guessed it.

Chairman Park Jinseong took me out from the research center and not long after that, he made a complete recovery.

-Whether it happens sooner or later, Kim Hyun-ho's identity will become revealed. In preparation for that, you have to become stronger as fast as you can, even by just a day, to be able to protect yourself.

“So that is why you told me about the karma transaction?”

-Yes. You even have to resort to using that to become stronger as fast as possible.

Odin continued.

-The karma cost is 1 million USD per 100 karma. If you pay the 10 m USD, you can get an item equal to that value of 1000 karma. If there is an item you want, that would be ideal, but if what you need is karma, then that item will have to be refunded through the mission board's refund system.

“So in reality it is [1 m USD for 50 karma](#).”

(TN: Remember that if you return an item, you can get a 50% karma refund on it from the system.)

That's incredibly expensive.

That means in order to buy 1000 karma it would cost 10 million dollars or 10 billion won.

-If you give me the money, I can purchase the karma and deal with them for you.

“Would that be alright?”

-I owe you quite a bit. My daughter is healthy and thanks to allying with the Brown Mountain elves, I received a higher prize than I expected in the last exam.

“Really? I am glad to hear that.”

That the alliance with the elves yielded such results for Odin was a good thing.

-I will give you my account number so if you want, you can put the amount of money you want to exchange into the account and give me a call.

“I understand. Thank you very much.”

That Odin would make the transaction in my place gave me a great sense of relief.

After I hung up, I sat deep in thought.

Currently in my Swiss account I have about 28 billion won. (~\$28M USD)

So for about 20 million USD I can get an item worth 2000 karma. And if I get it refunded into karma, that's only 1000 karma.

‘That's too little.’

I need more money.

I received a lot of money from Chairman Park Jinseong so I am not really greedy for more but with this, I would have to concentrate more on making some money.

While I was thinking about it, I quickly made a call to Chairman Park Jinseong.

This old man...he wouldn't suddenly decide to stop answering my calls because he got everything he needed from me, would he?

Thankfully, Chairman Park Jinseong picked up right away.

“How unexpected. You picked up.”

-Asshole, I'm not that disloyal. Why are you calling?

“I have to make some money.”

Chairman Park Jinseong momentarily went silent.

Then he said.

-Are you going to buy karma?

Wow, he's quick for sure.

“Yes.”

-Tsk, it is not good to get mixed up with those Chinese folk. Why do you think I made you come to work in cabin in the woods and kept you hidden?

“I am sure it was to keep my identity hidden. I am thankful for that.”

-Well at least you know it. Alright, how much money do you need?

“The more the better.”

-Wouldn't 10 billion won (10 million USD) do? If it's just that much I can just give it to you. I was going to give you that as a bonus anyway.

“If you would, I would be happy to take it. But I need more. Is there no other old man like you that may die today or tomorrow?”

-Ah, you speak so disgracefully. Why would there not be? I am already stressed about that.

“You are stressed?”

-That old man who made the cars with the airbags that won't work.

“.....Future Automobile?”

-Yep, Chairman Han Man-young. That old fart has been bothering me lately and keeps asking me how I got cured.

“And did you tell him?”

-Am I crazy? I never said that I was incurable but that it was all just for show. But that old fart, I get the feeling that they didn't believe me. He knows a decent amount about the Arena, you see.

“If I could cure him completely, how much do you think he would pay me?”

-I suppose that would depend on how much longer he lives. Even if he gets cured, if he believes that he doesn't have much time left to live, don't you think he won't pay much for it? He's kind of a stingy old man.

“But Chairman, you got treatment and are good as new.”

-That's right. That old man, seeing me recover and returning to work motivated him a lot. If I can talk to him well about it, I think he would probably pay up to 80 billion won. (~80 million USD)

“Didn't you say he's stingy?”

-He won't just waste money or use it haphazardly. The founder of Future Auto was like that too. But if he is able to afford that, he would gladly pay the sum.

80 billion!

Then I can do about 10m USD and get 4,000 karma.

“80 billion is quite a lot.”

-Yes. Even though Jinseong Electric Corporation is the best in the nation, we can't catch up to the Future Company yet. Anyway, you want an introduction?

“Yes, but I don't want to personally meet him. I would like to use your secretary to deliver the flames.”

-Understood. Then with the 10 billion won and the introduction, my debt is paid?

“Yes, thank you.”

My heart is pounding.

If I make loads of money this way and can purchase karma, my strength will soar.

2 days later, I received a text from Chairman Park Jinseong.

[Chairman Park Jinseong: 70]

70b.....

Now with the 10b that Chairman Park Jinseong deposited plus my current balance, I had 108b won.

‘Incredible.’

Then I can use \$100M to get 10,000 karma item.

Even if I were to change the items to receive as karma, that’s still 5,000 karma!

I can get the same amount of karma as I won in this most recent 6th turn exam!

‘I can always make more money.’

I don’t think using money a waste at all.

There will always be rich people like Chairman Park Jinseong or Chairman Han Man-young of Future Auto who will want my treatment.

I sent a reply to Chairman Park Jinseong.

[Me: I will do it. I will begin the treatment as soon as the money is deposited into my Swiss account.]

A moment later, I was contacted again.

But this time, it wasn't Chairman Park Jinseong, but was Jinseong group's head of the third secretarial office, Lee Jungshik, instead.

-Hello, how are you.

-Hi, it's been a long time.

-Beginning tomorrow, someone from our office will be by every morning. What time would be good for you?

"10 am would be good. I moved so let me give you my new address."

I gave him the address of the new penthouse I moved to.

-The money will be deposited this afternoon or midday tomorrow so please check it.

"Yes."

Transferring 70b right away, Future Group is incredible.

I contacted Odin.

-Have you decided?

“Yes, tomorrow by midday I will deposit \$100M.

-Woah, sounds like it'll be a huge deal. All in karma?

“Yes.”

-Got it. Here's my account number.

I wrote down Odin's account number. It too was an Arena bank in Switzerland.

That afternoon, using the mobile app linked to the Swiss bank, I got an alert. The money from Chairman Park Jinseong and Chairman Han Man-young was all deposited.

[91,664,056.48 (CHF)] (~95 million USD)

That is the amount in Swiss francs in my account.

Calculating the American dollar and Swiss franc, 100 million dollars was 93,560,320 francs.

‘Huh? The amount isn't quite enough.’

I gave Odin a call.

“I am so sorry but could I borrow 2m francs and pay you back later?”

-Ha, just send the 90m francs.

“I am so sorry.”

-Don't mention it.

Like that, I transferred 90m francs to Odin and all I had left is 1.6m francs.

In Korean money it was about 1.9billion won (\$1.9M).

Maybe it was because such a large sum came in and then left, but the 1.9 billion won seemed like chump change now.

‘Money is only temporary.’

How else can I make money?

Saudi kings or the Rockefeller family's money...if I could get them, making a few trillion wouldn't be just a dream.

‘I wonder if changing that much money to karma would even be

possible?’

The karma might become so rare that the prices may skyrocket.

An employee from the 3rd secretarial office from Jinseong group came to find me at 10 am. Min-jeong had gone to work and wasn't home which is why I picked this time.

In the black bottle the employee handed me, I put in two flames of life.

“Please tell him that they have to be consumed within the day. And the treatment time is 20 days.”

“Understood.”

The employee treated the bottle preciously as he left.

I anxiously awaited a call from Odin to come.

‘It's not like it can be done instantly, I should relax and give it some time.’

I spent the days giving flames of life to the employee every morning.

Every now and then, I checked the balance on the credit card I gave to Hyun-ji to use, lately she was losing her reservations about spending and was starting to spend a couple 10,000 won (\$10) at cafés and restaurants.

I was going to say something to her but held it in. it's really not that much.

We would still be able to live very comfortably in our everyday lives with the remaining balance in the Swiss account.

A week went by.

During that time, Chairman Park Jinseong called and he said that Chairman Han Man-young of Future Auto was very pleased and wanted to meet me.

Of course, I refused.

Because I don't want my identity exposed.

And then, coincidentally, the call I'd been waiting for arrived.

-The transaction was completed successfully.

“Really?”

-Even those Chinese bastards won't cheat on such a big transaction with someone like me. Anyhow, when time allows, you will come to Denmark?

"I will. I will go right away on a flight tomorrow."

-Buy your ticket and let me know your arrival time.

"Yes."

I immediately went to the airline's homepage to search and bought a ticket that would be leaving the next day.

The plane that would be leaving tomorrow at 1 pm had a first class seat left so I quickly nabbed it.

When Min-jeong got home from work, I told her I would be going to Denmark.

"Again?"

"Mm, I have work."

"I guess you have lots of work in Denmark?"

"Yep."

“Oppa, you’re so cool. Going to Europe for business. Aw, I want to go abroad too.”

“Tell me when you get vacation days. I’ll take you someplace nice.”

“Really?”

Min-jeong’s eyes started glittering.

It was so cute, I stroked her hair.

“But you can’t tell Hyun-ji. She’ll nag to come with us.”

“Hehe, okay.”

That day, Min-jeong was in high spirits and she prepared a grand meal.

The next day, I gave two flames of life to the employee who came by at 10am and told him that I will be pausing treatments for a couple days due to a business trip.

I’m sure Chairman Han Man-young won’t throw a fit for a couple days.

‘Even if he’s unsatisfied, what can he do?’

With a light heart, I headed to Incheon airport and got myself on the plane to Denmark.

Arriving at the Copenhagen airport and going through customs and into a taxi, the whole thing was now second nature. Not like I’ve done this only a few times now...

At the room of the underground restaurant of the hotel, like always, I reunited with Odin.

“Welcome.”

“The goods?”

“Everything is wet. Don’t worry.”

With that, Odin summoned a bunch of items.

“Summon, twenty item backpacks.”

With that, twenty large backpacks appeared at once, filling the room to the brim.

“Uh, what is all this?”

“They are item backpacks. It is like the item bag but it is more expensive as it is larger. They are each a 500 karma item.”

I took all 20 item backpacks.

When the ownership was passed to me, I de-summoned them and made them disappear.

Then I summoned just one back out and checked the item on the board.

-Item backpack (large): things that have not been itemized can be stored and pass through the exam door. The magic treated leather does not rip.

*Size: 61x43x30 (-500)

Chapter 97 – Karma Transaction (2)

“I will exchange all 20 item backpacks for karma.”

When I said that, the words on the board changed.

-20 Item Backpack (Large) will be exchanged for 5,000 karma.

-Will you exchange?

“I will.”

Pat!

A light shone momentarily from the board.

-Item Backpack (Large) 20 have been used.

-You have acquired 5,000 karma.

-Remaining karma: +5,000

“I really did get 5,000 karma.”

“Congratulations. You will be much stronger with that.”

“I really had no idea you could buy karma with money. No matter how precious money is, a life is on the line in the exams so to sell karma.....”

Odin drank all the alcohol in his glass.

Then he started grinding his teeth as he said.

“It is time for you, Kim Hyun-ho, to learn a bit more about this community.”

I listened to Odin with all ears.

“When you look at all the examinees, I can be considered as someone on the stronger side. Since, so far, I have never failed an exam.”

“I can see that. I was really awed by the aura sword you used at The Brown Mountain.”

Odin smiled and said.

“That is right. I am on the strong side. But as strong as I may be, I cannot say that stronger people don’t exist. Since there are some monsters that have passed the 50th exam.”

I flinched when he said the 50th exam.

Then just how long have those people lived in the Arena.

“Of course, there are lots of those examinees that have nearly reached the ultimate destination in the exam. But what do you think is the reason the exam still continues?”

“Why is that?”

“It is for money.”

“.....?!”

“In order to make money, they purposely do not clear the exams. Even when the mission is given to them, they focus solely on gather majeong in Arena.”

“But if they don’t do the mission...”

“They get minus karma. So before then, they get rid of the karma they do have.”

Odin continued his explanation.

First off, they steadily clear the missions and receive the karma

prizes and get stronger.

And then at a certain point when they have become strong enough, they begin concentrating on collecting majeong.

For a while they gather majeong here and there while clearing the mission and when they reach the point where it is no longer as easy to do the mission along with gathering the majeong, they daringly give up on the mission.

“China’s communist party is going crazy in their efforts to acquire majeong, the next generation’s energy source, in large quantities. They give a generous reward to examinees and sometimes force them to bring back majeong.”

“But not clearing the missions, they have no way of guaranteeing their survival?”

“That isn’t exactly the case. Not clearing the mission and staying in a safe place and just collecting majeong is actually safer. Rather, if you try to clear exam, you have to put your life on the line, and that’s dangerous.”

I went blank.

Giving up on the mission is safer?

That was possible?

The gods know about this situation and are leaving it alone?

Without any penalty?

“So, you’re saying there is no penalty for examinees who purposely give up on the exams?”

“Why wouldn’t there be a penalty? Minus karma is the definition of that penalty.”

“What is the effect of the minus karma?”

“Examinees that have accumulated minus karma are called ‘dropped examinees.’ If you kill a dropped examinee, you get that minus amount in karma.”

“Have you killed any?”

I asked.

Odin nodded his head.

“Just once. He was a Chinese examinee and he was strong. But he underestimated me.”

“Then the normal, average examinees must seek out these

dropped examinees.”

“It is hostile relations. Because they are grand prey. Not only that, Chinese examinees kill each other for it too. After letting someone gather lots of minus karma, they kill that person and sell the karma that they get.”

I could feel my insides start churning.

That people were focusing on making money and not clearing missions and killing each other.

What kind of chaotic situation has this become?

Gods nor angels, none of them foresaw a situation like this?

Or is this situation too something that they had wanted and even planned for?

‘Just what is the true purpose of the exams?’

The rules of the universe along with the gods, how could they be allowing this to happen? Or maybe they know and simply don’t care.

It can only be surmised to be the generosity of the gods that are allowing such actions from humanity.

“Do you think all the ultimate destination of all the examinees is the same?”

“It is assumed that that is the case. It is a closely guarded secret and therefore not verified as such but it does seem that all the exams for all examinees is headed in the same direction.”

“And what is that?”

“I don’t know that either. I am just at the 20th exam so.”

Odin let me know.

“Mr. Kim Hyun-ho, be careful not to be eliminated yourself.”

“No matter the odds, that won’t happen. I want to clear all the exams and return to a safe life.”

“That is a good mentality to have. I am the same. I don’t want to fight endless battles in the Arena. I just want to spend a happy life with my daughter.”

“.....”

“Please clear your exam. Let’s finish this crazy shit and put a nail in its coffin.”

“Yes.”

We promised each other so and parted ways.

That night, I boarded onto my pre-booked flight and returned to Korea.

The inside of my head was a mess.

If the final destination for all examinees is indeed the same.....

If just one person reaches that destination and completes that exam, the exams themselves will disappear. Then all the examinees don't have to do the exams anymore.

But the situation is that with China at the head, many nations are pursuing the collection of majeong.

If majeong becomes the natural resource energy for the next generation, would they leave alone the only way they can get the majeong? With no exams, the examinees can no longer gather the majeong.

Would those examinees just leave it alone and allow the end of their easy money-making days?

‘They might even distract others from completing the exams.

At the thought that fellow examinees may distract others from their exams floods me with fear.

If I keep up in the exams, eventually there will be a time when an examinee will be pitted against another examinee.

In that instance, I might be threatened in the real world as well.

Even after getting 5000 karma, I returned to Korea with a heavy heart.

When I got home, it was 7 pm and Min-jeong hadn't come home yet. She must have been working late.

'First, I need to think about what to buy with the karma I bought.'

I summoned my board and checked all the skills I had acquired so far.

-Showing all skills acquired by examinee Hyun-ho Kim.

-Main Skill: Spirit Summons (Intermediate Level 1)

-Assist Skill: Physical strength buff (Intermediate Level 5), Guider (Entry Level 1), Teleportation (Entry Level 4)

-Special Skill: Synthesis Skill

-Synthesis Skill: Divine Protection of the Wind (Entry Level 5), Divine Protection of Fire (Entry Level 1), Reflex (Intermediate Level 3), Flame of Life (Intermediate Level 2), Transmission (Entry Level 1), Space Bag (Entry Level 4), Shooting (Entry Level 1)

-Remaining Karma: +5,000

The first thing that came to mind was the Spirit Summons.

From that point on, my biggest strength, my main skill, I had a feeling I had to consistently increase it.

But with its level currently at Intermediate Level 1, to raise the Spirit Summons to the next level would require an incredible amount of karma.

Through the board, I checked how much karma would be needed for each level and it read as follows.

-Spirit Summons Intermediate Level 2 (-1,700)

-Spirit Summons Intermediate Level 3 (-1,900)

So, for now, I could only get to Intermediate Level 3 with 3,600 karma.

‘How nice it was that I was able to increase the Spirit Summons by using the Tree of Life.’

The more I thought about it, the harder it was to accept the immense amount of karma that it would take for the main skill level to increase.

But if I am careless about my main skill, I probably won’t be able to be strong like Odin later.

From what I heard yesterday, Odin was able to become strong early on by concentrating on growing his main skill, his Aura Control.

“I will let you in on one secret. The skills I have don’t go beyond three. That is the method to how a mere 20th turn examinee became the strong.”

I was surprised.

He became someone great by digging one big well.

‘Now that I think of it, way before, Chun-seong Kang had like Entry Level 4 Aura Control even without using karma, didn’t he?’

I remembered.

Using his aptitude from martial arts that he honed all his life, he used that to practice his Aura Control and increase his levels.

Then likewise, can I use training to increase the Spirit Summons?

‘First off, it would be good to be in a place where there was a strong flow of energy from nature.’

Thanks to getting to the Intermediate level of the Spirit Summons, the power of nature was flowing inside my body too.

It is a mechanism where the power of the surrounding nature gives aid to my body, and the difference in power can be felt when I am atop a mountain versus in a city like I am now.

‘The spirit summons will probably go up if I spend time in Gyeryongsan Mountain like Spirituals do.’

But even doing that, I would probably have to spend years up there and it likely still won’t go up an entire level.

When I was at The Brown Mountain, I was atop the Tree of Life

where the energy of nature was overflowing and I had to be there for a year for my level to barely go up by one.

Right now, its level was higher than it was then, intermediate level 1.

Without a Tree of Life, no matter how long I live in nature, it would take ages to increase my level by just one.

‘Hold up, a Tree of Life?’

I suddenly recalled all the time I spent raising the Tree of Life.

The pine tree and the maple tree and the Thuja tree too, after eating my flames of life and growing, they became of Trees of Life.

The flame of life is a synthesis skill that was created by combining Spirit Summons (Kasa) with a healing potion.

Thus, in the flame of life is the power of a spirit, thus, it also contains the power of nature.

“Sylph, Kasa!”

-Meow

-Bark, bark!

For the first time in a long time, Sylph and Kasa were summoned.

Having become an intermediate spirit, Sylph's appearance was the same but she became twice as big.

Kasa who used to be a young puppy, having become an intermediate spirit, has now shed his young appearance and looked like he went through a rapid growth spurt. At full growth, maybe a Jindo? At a Superior Level, he will make an impressive large dog.

“Meow!”

“Grrr!”

Despite having grown larger, like always, the two are bickering atop my head for the spot.

Thank goodness they have no weight because otherwise I would have been crushed under them.

“Flame of Life!”

I made two flames of life. Because I wasn't able to get them to Future Automobile's Chairman Man-Young Han, I have these to spare.

“Okay, now look.”

-Meow?

-Pant pant pant.....!

Sylph and Kasa stared at the flames of life.

“Do you guys, perhaps, want to eat these?”

-Meow!

-Bark!

The two spirits immediately started nodding their heads. Especially Kasa, he looked like he was about to drool.

“If you eat these, can you guys grow?”

This time too, the two spirits nodded their heads.

‘My train of thought was right!’

If I can raise the Spirit Summons level using the flame of life, there would be no need to use karma for my main skill.

“Okay, eat.”

I gave one flame of life to each spirit.

Sylph and Kasa thoroughly enjoyed their flames.

Even then, Kasa whined and scratched with his front paws for more.

“Later, I’ll give you more later.”

As soon as Chairman Man-young Han’s treatment is over, I’ll give the flames to the spirits.

It might even be possible to raise the spirit levels a few times over during this rest period.

‘Then I will use my karma to increase my other skill levels.’

I started spending my karma prize.

First off, the reflex skill

“I will raise my reflex skill to Superior Level 1.”

-2,500 karma will be used to increase reflex (Synthesis Skill) to Superior Level 1.

-Reflex (Synthesis Skill): have great know-how in moving/maneuvering one's body

*Superior Level 1: Exhibit mastery in all things that require bodily movements

-Remaining karma: +2,500

Of the skills I have, reflex is the most important following the synthesis skill. With this, I don't need other martial arts skills.

‘Shall I try it out?’

I took out the violin from my space bag.

Of all the books, I picked the hardest piece I know.

Despite not having played in quite a while, I'm able to play without much difficulty. My fingers are so abled, like they were playing an easy song.

‘This is superior!’

At the nearly fraudulent ability of my reflex skill, I felt overjoyed.

Chapter 98 – A New Birth (1)

The feeling of my fingers freely pressing on the strings was such a strange feeling that I became immersed in playing for a while.

With a fast tempo, I played through the entire book that I had previously studied and I was in awe.

“This is so broken!”

Even when I think about it, the reflex is an unbelievable skill.

Amongst the assist skills that can be got by karma, there is a cooking, sparring/fighting, and a swordsmanship skill. There is even a music playing skill.

But with the reflex skill alone, I can do all those things.

Using one skill to be good at multiple assist skills!

Now I have 2,500 karma left.

What should I do with these?

I looked through all the skills I had so far.

First of all, pass on the spirit summons.

I raised the reflex just now to superior level 1 so pass on that too.

There's no need to raise the guider another level, maybe the teleportation?

“Show me Teleportation.”

At my order, the words on the board changed.

-Teleportation (assist skill): leap through space in the direction you want. Think of the desired direction and say “teleportation.”

*Entry level 4: distance 9 m. cool down time 5 minutes.

It's just entry level 4 and the cool down time is only 5 minutes.

If I raise the level a bit more, maybe the cool down time will disappear altogether?

If the cool down time disappears, I can use the teleportation repeatedly and it'll be incredibly useful.

“Show me the distance and cool down time for each level of teleportation.”

The board must have understood what I said because it shows me the information I want. It's a very interesting piece of AI.

-Teleportation (Assist Skill) showing the distance and cool down time by level.

*Entry level 4: 9 m, 5 min

*Entry level 5: 12 m, 1 min (-300)

*Intermediate level 1: 12 m, 10 x day (-400)

*Intermediate level 2: 15 m, 20 x day (-500)

*Intermediate level 3: 15 m, 30 x day (-600)

*Intermediate level 4: 15 m, 40 x day (-700)

-Remaining karma: +2,500

Starting at intermediate level 1 the cool down time disappears and is instead replaced with ten times a day.

‘So, it means without the cool down, I can use it ten times one

after the other without pause.'

Starting at intermediate level 2, the distance doesn't increase but just the number of times I can use it a day increases.

'I think it will be good just to get it to intermediate level 1.'

I felt that raising it higher than that would be a waste of karma.

"I will raise teleportation o intermediate level 1."

-Using 700 karma to raise teleportation (assist skill) to intermediate level 1.

-Teleportation (assist skill): leap through space in the direction you want. Think of the desired direction and say "teleportation."

*Intermediate level 1: distance 12 m, 10 x day (resets at midnight)

-Remaining karma: +1,800

Continuing on, I brought up the flame of life. Because the flame of life could be used to raise the spirit summons, it will be good to raise its power.

“With the current karma, I will raise my flame of life as much as possible.”

-Showing all the stats if you are to use all remaining karma on flame of life (synthesis skill).

-Flame of life (synthesis skill): blow in a flame of life and revive life. Can be used twice a day.

*Intermediate level 4: can be used for: strength recovery, anti-aging, illness, and curses.

-Remaining karma: +500

1,300 karma is used and I will have left 500.

I nodded my head.

“I’ll do this.”

Pat!

The board started shining.

-With 1,300 karma, the flame of life (synthesis skill) will be raised to intermediate level 4.

-Remaining karma: +500

After that, the Divine Protection of the Wind that was at entry level 5; I raised it to intermediate level 1.

It's just a one level difference but the entry to intermediate level power difference is completely different which is why I did it.

-Using 400 karma to raise the Divine Protection of the Wind (synthesis skill) to intermediate level 1.

-Divine protection of wind (synthesis skill): ride a strong wind. Gains power from using the user's concentration, skill level, and spirit summons level.

*Intermediate level 1: duration time 50 minutes, cool down time 25 minutes.

-Remaining karma: +100

'100 karma?'

It is exactly enough karma to get a new assist skill.

‘Should I use skill synthesis to put together ingredients for another skill?’

I first asked the board to show me all the skills I could get.

I flit through the list and there were a lot of interesting ones but there wasn’t one in particular that I needed.

‘It would be good if it was related to shooting. Maybe a skill that could increase the power of the bullet.... Huh?’

I thought of something good.

‘What if I itemize bullets and use them as ingredients in the skill synthesis?’

Why hadn’t I thought of this before!

I immediately took out the magnum .357 bullets from the space bag.

“I want to itemize this.”

The words on the board switched around.

-Itemizing ten Magnum .357 bullets will cost 1 karma. Would you like to itemize?

-Remaining karma: +100

1 karma per 10 bullets.

Will it use one bullet if I use them as ingredients for skill synthesis?

Ten of the magnum bullets have itemized and my remaining karma had been reduced to 99.

“Skill synthesis!”

-Please select the skill or item you wish to combine.

Skills available for synthesis: spirit summons (Sylph), spirit summons (Kasa), physical strength buff, guider, teleportation

Items available for synthesis: Mosin-Nagant, Neilson H2 (quantity 2), magnum bullets (quantity 10)

*Items used for synthesis will be used up.

I'll go through the list.

“Sylph and magnum bullet.”

-Synthesizing spirit summons (Sylph) and .357 bullets.

-Synthesis fails.

“Kasa and magnum bullet.”

-Synthesizing spirit summons (Kasa) and .357 bullets.

“Won't work again. Then maybe the physical strength buff and magnum bullet?”

As light comes from the board. This time is a success!

-Synthesis success. You have acquired the ammo impact perk.

-One magnum .357 bullet has been used.

-Ammo impact (synthesis skill): increases the surface penetration of the bullets.

*Entry level 1

“Nice!”

I pumped my fists up in the air and feel a pang of delight.

I got exactly what I wanted. A skill that made my bullets more powerful.

If I added the power of the spirits to this, the power would be even greater of the bullets.

‘Let’s keep going.’

“I will synthesize guider with magnum bullet.”

-Guider (assist skill) will synthesize with magnum .357 bullet.

-Synthesis failed. You have already received the shooting skill (synthesis skill).

‘So, this can happen too.’

Now for the last one I tried synthesizing the teleportation and magnum bullet.

And this time too, light came from the board. It was the reaction of a success synthesis.

-Synthesis success. You have obtained the Reload skill (synthesis skill)

-One magnum .357 bullet has been used.

-Using the reload skill (synthesis skill) during shooting will cause the gun to be automatically reloaded. You must have available bullets in the item bag or space bag.

‘Whoa.’

This too is definitely a skill I needed.

The bullets in my space bag will automatically be used during shooting!

This eliminates the hassle of taking the bullets out and placing them one by one in person.

This reload skill doesn't have levels to it. This is just it.

'Well, it's good I don't have to worry about its levels.'

With this, I had finished using my karma

It's actually an incredible amount of karma I just used, equal to \$1m.

'In theory, a million dollars....'

It's such a large sum that I can't even wrap my head around it. So, I don't even feel the pain of using it.

Going forward, if I come into large sums of money, I'm going to turn it into karma and do it like this again.

Money, I can always make more of, but karma I can't always make.

'I will clear all the exams no matter what.'

My determination grew.

I will beat the ultimate goal of these exams and finish this crap once and for all.

When all the exams are clear and examinees are no longer on this earth the majeong that will be used as the new energy source won't be attainable anymore either.

But that isn't my problem to fix.

Those examinees and their nations that are crazy for the majeong, they can go to hell.

Korean arena research center.

At the top of the building, the 10th floor, at the end of the hallway was an office where a middle-aged man was looking at the monitor.

On the monitor was the latest article on a news portal site.

[Jinseong Electronics' new product release, it might be the 'Park Jinseong recovery effect']

“So, he really is all better.”

With a fat build and half bald, the middle-aged man was closely looking at a picture of a smiling chairman Park Jinseong.

On the name board on the desk it read 'Chief Kim Joong-tae'.

He was this agency's head, Chief Kim Joong-tae.

On the desk was a file related to Kim Hyun-ho.

Examine Kim Hyun-ho.

From what he knew, he was an unlucky examinee who had lost all his teammates in the 3rd exam.

He had a special main skill, the spirit summons, that made him exciting, but there was no hope of his survival so he was given up on. Rooting and supporting a rookie with no hopes of survival would be a waste of resources.

Coincidentally, that was when he had received a call from Chairman Park Jinseong.

Chairman Park Jinseong had always been generous with his donations to the agency and it was difficult to deny his request.

The chief was going to throw him away anyway so he unreluctantly gave up Kim Hyun-ho without much thought.

But then afterwards, Chairman Park Jinseong, who had been slowly dying from illness, became healthy and lively.

How was he supposed to interpret this?

With his suspicions, he put an employee onto the task of surveilling examinee Kim Hyun-ho.

Surprisingly, Kim Hyun-ho was still alive.

The hopeless Kim Hyun-ho was still alive.

About now he would be a 6th turn examinee but despite that, he was still alive.

Clearing the exams on your own is something impossible unless one was a pretty strong veteran examinee.

This means there was an external helper.

Chairman Park Jinseong has acquired external assistance for Kim Hyun-ho.

Why?

Obtaining an external helper required quite a bit of money.

Why did he do such a thing for a mere 3rd turn examinee like Kim Hyun-ho?

There could only be one reason.

Chairman Park Jinseong's completely recovered appearance explained that reason well.

‘Kim Hyun-ho has the ability to heal diseases!’

“Damn it, I lost a big one.”

Chief Kim Joong-tae started swearing.

He threw him away thinking he was garbage but it turns out he was the goose that lays the golden eggs.

“Damn, I should have caught on when Chairman Park Jinseong made his request.”

The ability to cure illnesses.

The examinee with that great power...if he were in the research center, that ability could have been used for great monetary gains.

It's not like there are just one or two rich old folks in the world.

Everyone gets sick and dies.

And everyone wants to live.

Chief Kim Joong-tae felt angry that he basically had his treasure taken away right in front of his eyes.

Regardless of how, he wanted to somehow use Kim Hyun-ho for some gains.

But how?

How can I use Kim Hyun-ho for my own benefit?

The answer was simple.

‘There are those crazy for money in neighboring countries.’

Chief Kim Joong-tae took out an old school flip phone from the inside pocket of his suit.

He looked through his address book and found the name he’s looking for.

[Chang-wee Lee]

He pushed the call button.

The calling out tone sounds and a young man answers the phone.

-What is it, Chief Kim Joong-tae.

“What do you think?”

Chief Kim Joong-tae spoke back in fluent Chinese. When he was in the national intelligence service, he was placed in China.

-Do you have any information worth sharing?

“I have some very precious information you’ll want.”

-What kind of information? If it is good, you’ll be paid well for it.

Chief Kim Joong-tae smiled wryly.

“Jinseong Group, Chairman Park Jinseong.”

-.....

A silence falls on them both.

The young Chinese man speaks.

-100,000 dollars.

“Puah!”

Chairman Kim Joong-tae replied by spitting on the floor.

-A million dollars.

“You guys are always like that. Saying you’ll pay well, pay well, and then trying to get it for nothing.”

-5 million dollars. If you don’t like it then fine. We’re looking for other routes anyway.

“Fine, let’s not.”

He folded his phone closed.

A moment later, a call came from Chang-wee lee.

“How much are you going to pay?”

-10 million dollars, but if it isn’t good information, I’ll kill you myself.

“Fine.”

Chief Kim Joong-tae wasn’t one to back down.

‘What kind of call was that?’

Cha Ji-hye had something to report which was why she had come but she didn’t go in and had stopped in front of the door instead.

Because she could hear a conversation happening in Chinese from inside.

Chapter 99 – A New Birth (Part 2)

It was after the call was over.

Knock knock.

At the sudden knock, chief Kim Joong-tae quickly removed the Kim Hyun-ho file that was atop his desk.

“Who is it?”

“This is Cha Ji-hye.”

“Oh, come in.”

During that quick conversation, chief Kim Joong-tae had a lot going on in his mind.

The knock that sounded was as if it had been waiting for him to finish his call.

She had been waiting in front of the door until the call was over.

Then did she hear the conversation? Does Cha Ji-hye know Chinese?

‘No, as far as I know, she doesn’t know Chinese.’

The door opened and Cha Ji-hye walked in.

In a white suit and red blazer and banging body.

As always, she came walking in with a wide stride, Cha Ji-hye gave her report.

“We have discovered someone who we suspect is a new examinee. A social media text was posted and we have hacked their ID and password and deleted it.”

“Really? What turn examinee do you suspect them to be?”

“Without anyone for support and afraid all alone is the feeling we got. I suspect it is a first turn examinee.”

“I see.”

Their eyes met for just a second.

A short moment's eye contact.

Very short. Just an instant.

“Well. I'll leave you, sir.”

“Mm, yes. Good work.”

Cha Ji-hye headed back out of the office.

‘Whew, I don’t think she knows anything. I need to be careful going forward.’

Because he had become so out of touch with the outside world and had started acting like the king of a secret research agency, chief Kim Joong-tae started blaming himself for being so carefree.

Chief Kim Joong-tae’s own opinion of himself being too lax was completely correct.

Unlike him, Cha Ji-hye was positive that there was something suspicious going on.

She didn’t know Chinese well. But she did understand some words.

Jinseong Group.

Money (Qian).

How much (Duo shao).

And from the window she could see what the reflection was of what was on chief Kim Joong-tae's computer monitor.

A picture of chairman Park Jinseong.

That was enough for Cha Ji-hye.

'He's trying to sell Kim Hyun-ho's identity to the Chinese.'

There were bad rumors floating around even since chief Kim Joong-tae's national intelligence service days.

He wasn't some inefficient pencil pusher or figurehead.

He has a dirty past.

The reason a man like him got this position in a large administration was because he was a figure with a meteoric rise in China.

And now it was without a doubt that he was trying to sell Kim Hyun-ho's identity to the Chinese examinees.

'I have to stop him.'

Kim Hyun-ho lost all his comrades and, even after becoming

alone, he survived. He is still alive so that meant he cleared his 6th exam.

This was the potential of the competent Kim Hyun-ho.

But any target of the Chinese examinees would be in danger. Now as a mere 6th turn examinee, Kim Hyun-ho alone wouldn't be able to defend himself from all the Chinese examinees.

‘I have to start tailing the chief.’

If it was information regarding chief Park Jinseong's recovery it's a big deal.

They'll want the information tonight or immediately tomorrow.

Chief Kim Joong-tae always had a set routine he followed every day but he will have to personally pull the file with Kim Hyun-ho's identity.

If possible, she must stop the transaction and at best she must leave the location of the transaction with proof and use it to cause chief Kim Joong-tae's downfall.

Kim Hyun-ho was no longer a part of the Korean Arena Research Agency but as the one that was responsible for him while he still was, she still felt a sense of responsibility.

‘I know what I have to do.’

First of all, she sent a warning message text to Kim Hyun-ho.

[Be careful of the Chinese. Be cautious and alert. No contact.]

To be careful, she sent the text on the emergency burner phone she always carried.

Cha Ji-hye decided that this should be more than enough information for him to understand the situation.

He has been with chairman Park Jinseong so he should know his way about this stuff.

And there was no way Kim Hyun-ho wouldn't know that his skills would eventually become the target of other nations either.

That evening, having taken the helicopter off the island, she hid the car she had parked near the helipad and staked out in it.

From the entrance of the helipad, chief Kim Joong-tae's BMW 7 appeared.

She left a good distance between them and started her pursuit.

Chief Kim Joong-tae was heading towards the Incheon Seollin-

dong Chinatown.

‘As expected.’

The Chinese person that the exchange is happening with is already in Korea.

It meant that he or she was already in Korea before they had heard anything from chief Kim Joong-tae. Or came as soon as they heard.

Regardless, this person had been searching for Kim Hyun-ho.

Crazy with the greed to not lose the goose that lays the golden eggs.

‘Should I go in now?’

Getting chief Kim Joong-tae now and stealing his file of Kim Hyun-ho, she thought about this option.

But no matter how she thought about it, that idea was simply too rash.

The opponent was the chief and he has a straight line to the blue house (connected to the white house) for sure.

Not only would she not be able to handle the aftermath, but doing that won't block the transfer of Kim Hyun-ho's related information into Chinese hands.

She was going to get proof of this back-alley transaction and then use that to cause his downfall. That was the best idea.

For now, she could only hope that Kim Hyun-ho can protect himself.

She sent him a warning so whether it is chairman Park Jinseong or the Denmark examinee group's Odin, he should be able to utilize his sources to defend himself.

She got out of her car and continued to tail chief Kim Joong-tae.

Chief Kim Joong-tae went into a tranquil restaurant with a Chinese owner.

Cha Ji-hye wasn't able to go in and instead had to watch the restaurant through a window from outside.

Thankfully, she could see where chief Kim Joong-tae was sitting.

‘Who is the one meeting him?’

With a silent camera, she was getting ready to take pictures as she scouted through the window.

Then a man appeared.

A young man with a tall build and short hair. He looked to be about in his young 30's.

Cha Ji-hye gasped in shock.

‘Lee Chang-wee!’

The bigshot of the Chinese examinees.

In the formal rankings, he does not exist but amongst all the examinees in the world he is considered as one of the best.

The way he was able to become so strong was by being a tool for the Chinese communist influencers.

He was getting other examinees to work for politicians and he himself became an influential figure amongst examinees.

He was basically their commander in chief.

Building strong relationships with those in power and using all manners of ugly methods, he acquired massive amounts of karma and got stronger.

‘No way, is Lee Chang-wee himself going to do this?’

If he really was pursuing this matter himself, Kim Hyun-ho would be in a desperately dangerous situation.

But thankfully, Lee Chang-wee wasn’t someone that put himself out there easily. He took care of most things by using those under him.

“It’s been a long time.”

Chief Kim Joong-tae greeted him with a smile.

Lee Chang-wee sat down across from him and gestured.

“The info.”

“I have to check the deposit first.”

“I have to check that the information is worth the deposit first.”

“It’s not like I don’t know that you guys check out the information and then say it’s not worth it when it is or just not pay straight out”

“You wish to die?”

“Tsk tsk.”

Chief Kim Joong-tae clicked his tongue.

“How will we make a deal this way. I am making a reasonable request and you threaten me? Deposit it into a swiss account while I watch.”

“If the information isn’t good, be prepared to die.”

“You already said that earlier.”

Lee Chang-wee smirked.

“Pretending to be a veteran is comic. You’re a man with his tail between his legs.”

“What?”

Chief Kim Joong-tae’s face looked embarrassed for the first time.

“Tail?”

“She’s one of yours, isn’t she? The young woman.”

At the words young woman, chief Kim Joong-tae recalled Cha Ji-hye.

‘Damn! Did I get caught then?’

It was obvious that chief Kim Joong-tae was in a predicament.

Then, Lee Chang-wee did something completely unexpected.

“Well, she’s taking pictures, let’s assume some poses.”

Saying that, Lee Chang-wee took a stack of cash out of his inside pocket and placed it on the table.

“What, what are you doing?”

“What do you mean, I’m giving her a good picture. I’m rather photogenic so it’s not a problem, but not you, huh?”

“Pfft....”

Abruptly, a blatant picture of chief Kim Joong-tae receiving money from Lee Chang-wee had been taken.

He had no idea that he would be had this easily and was completely flustered.

A bit later, after calming himself down, chief Kim Joong-tae spoke.

“9 million (won).” (9,000 USD)

“5 million (won).”

“Now listen!”

“4.5 million. It will keep going down. Mr. Hyung, your back-alley transaction has a picture taken.”

“Fuck. Fine.”

Lee Chang-wee had a huge smile on his face.

“Who told you to lose your senses? Tsk tsk, being tracked. That’s the level of a Korean spy for you.”

“Enough of that, take care of it now.”

“That’s what I’m thinking.”

Said Lee Chang-wee.

“Teleport.”

That instant, Lee Chang-wee disappeared.

“Kuk!”

The moment Lee Chang-wee disappeared, Cha Ji-hye reflexively rolled her body to the right.

Pat!

By just a hair, Lee Chang-wee’s grasped nothing but empty space.

“Oh! You dodged?”

To Cha Ji-hye, it was Chinese that she couldn’t understand but she got what he meant through his tone and body language.

Getting right up, Cha Ji-hye tried to secretly push her finger to send the pictures to her email.

But Lee chan-wee didn’t give her that chance.

The moment Lee Chang-wee’s figure became blurry, Cha Ji-hye boldly ran forward and threw a flying knee kick.

Puk!

It was blocked by Lee Chang-wee's elbow.

No matter how small, she successfully put a stop to his attack.

“Haha! Again? You're an impressive woman! If you were an examinee, you would have become a big shot. That is a pity.”

Lee Chang-wee showed her something in his hand.

“How is this in my hand?”

“Kuk!”

Cha Ji-hye squeaks when she realized that her smartphone was stolen.

Bba du duk! (cr-uuuush!)

Lee Chang-wee put all his strength into his fist and the smartphone was crushed to bits.

“I will send you to heaven with a full corpse. Summon, Kaiser Silver Longsword.”

A dark silvered light longsword appeared in his right hand.

To the end, Cha Ji-hye showed no signs of fear.

Even at the moment her heart was pierced, to the end, she just kept repeating something over and over.

As if making a wish.

Like leaving a will.

Kwajik-

The dark silver longsword penetrated her heart.

“.....!”

Cha Ji-hye stared Lee Chang-wee straight in the face, and accepted death. Her lips quivered and then stopped.

“Retrieve.”

The longsword disappeared.

For a while, Lee Chang-wee admired the disaster he had created and then tilted his head.

“I can’t tell what it was you were mumbling. It would have been good if I had a translation skill.”

With the teleportation skill, Lee Chang-wee disappeared again.

Just the corpse of the bleeding Cha Ji-hye was left dumped in the dark alley.

When she came to, she first felt a flush heat.

The humidity and heat mixed and took over her whole body.

When she opened her eyes, she saw a dense jungle.

A blue sky blocked with huge leaves.

A lively sun shining down.

And then a rectangular board about the size of a notebook appeared.

-Examinee Cha Ji-hye. Your desire for the exams was heard.

-It was deemed you have the aptitude necessary and you were selected to become an examinee.

-If you wish to become an examinee, select confirm, if not, select deny.

With a husky voice, she has to squeeze out, she says

“Confirm.”

Then the words on the board changed.

-Name: Cha Ji-hye

-Class: 1

-Karma: 0

-Mission: survive the duration of the time limit.

-Time limit: 30 minutes

Survive.

30 minutes.

Cha Ji-hye got up right away.

With a sharp eye, she surveyed her surroundings.

A jungle with lots of marshes.

Heat and humidity.

‘Lizardman. Mud Golem. A 1st turn level lizardman.’

A new examinee was born.

Chapter 100 – A New Birth (Part 3)

First off, Cha Ji-hye went towards a nearby tree.

After checking out what the enemy was, her plan was to avoid it from atop a tree.

“Shiik.....!”

The monster that appeared making a wily sound was the expected lizardman.

Its stature was only slightly smaller than a grown man.

Except for the abdomen, nearly the entire body was covered in scales.

A flitting tongue and sharp fingernails and toenails.

This was the real version of the thing she had only seen illustrated before.

It is only just the one.

Cha Ji-hye decided to fight.

The opponent was one that she could defeat.

She only needed to survive for 30 minutes, but if she fights and beats it that would be even better.

‘I just have to be watch out for the nails and teeth.’

With her guard up, Cha Ji-hye slowly approached the lizardman.

“Shik!”

The impatient lizardman rushed forward first.

Instantly, she dodged with a side step and then a left jab.

Shu pak!

“Shwik!”

The jab landed on the lizardman’s protruding jaw.

Continuing on, she kept hitting him with left jabs followed by right hooks to the mouth.

Puk puk!

“Shwiik!”

The lizardman shook its head back and forth and shakily started stepping back from her.

The shwik shwik sound rang out loud as if it was getting angrier.

A lizardman's weak points were the jaw and the scale-less abdominal area. That's why she targeted the jaw.

'It's all going according to plan.'

The lizardman's eyes starting looking towards her slightly extended left hand. It started to recognize her punching pattern.

If that's the case, this just became a lot easier.

As if she was about to throw a jab, she lightly feinted with her left fist. The lizardman's body flinched a bit at that motion.

Within a split second, her right hand threw a straight at its jaw.

Bbuk!

"Shwik!"

The straight landed perfectly on its jaw.

The jaw wasn't a crucial weak point but the point was to disorient the lizardman.

Using that timing, Cha Ji-hye lunged forward and boldly clinched his head with both arms, then threw a knee at his midsection.

Bbuk!

Her knee went in hard straight to its abdomen!

The look of agony finally appeared on the lizardman's face.

“Shwik! Shiiik!”

Now that he was really pissed off, lizardman haphazardly flung his nails around.

But she had already let go of her clinch and backed away so his attack wasn't able to reach Cha Ji-hye.

“Shwiik!”

With a really angry demeanor, the lizardman chased after her.

Cha Ji-hye again lifted her left fist.

She got its attention with her fists and with her right leg that was firm as a deer she put all her power into a kick.

Bbuuk!

A perfect kick to the solar plexus!

“Shik!”

The lizardman that had been running towards her was suddenly sent flying backwards.

Puk!

She kicked again and it landed on its chest.

As the lizardman's body faltered backwards, Cha Ji-hye quickly lowered her body and kicked out the lizardman's back legs.

The lizardman lost its balance and tumbled to the ground.

Cha Ji-hye quickly looked around her.

She grabbed the closest rock she saw.

With the sharp end, she smashed down on the lizardman's face.

Bbuk!

“Shwiik!”

“Hu aab!”

Using both hands while yelling, she smashed the rock down again and again.

Bbu kuk!

The sound of flesh ripping apart permeated the air.

The lizardman’s face was covered in scales as well, but the right eye had no such cover.

“Shiiiik-!”

A strange screaming sound came from the lizardman’s throat.

Jjuuk! Jjuk! Bbuuk!

Cha Ji-hye grit her teeth and kept smashing down on the lizardman’s face with the rock.

She kept smashing at the part she's ripped.

Green blood spurted out.

At last, there were no more sounds of screaming. The lizardman had stopped moving and was lying there dead underneath her.

“Huuk, huk!”

While she tried to catch her breath, Cha Ji-hye stood up.

“Board retrieval.”

She retrieved her board and checked out how much time was left. There's roughly 17 minutes remaining.

Cha Ji-hye climbed up a tree and passed the rest of her time up there.

It was because the bloody smell of the dead lizardman might attract other monsters or wild animals.

When all 17 minutes were up, a door appeared in front of her.

‘The exam door!’

She fearlessly opened the door and walked into the blinding light

as she approached whatever was waiting for her inside.

She got a cozy feeling as the environment changed.

The sky and the ground, everything was white.

A completely empty white space with nothing in it.

Cha Ji-hye looked around her.

When she looked up, even she couldn't help but be startled.

A baby angel was right above her head and looking straight down at her. From a distance where it could nearly touch her.

“Are you well?”

Playfully, the baby angel greeted her.

Cha Ji-hye looked the baby angel up and down.

An oddly revolting face.

A mocking tone of voice.

And a dangling small.....

“The angel in charge of examinee Kim Hyun-ho?”

“Wow, have you heard lots about me?”

“Mostly bad.”

“Hehehe.”

The baby angel chuckled.

With small wings like a sparrows, flapping hectically, flying around.

Cha Ji-hye could understand why Kim Hyun-ho had to grit his teeth and hated the baby angel so much.

“Aw, that isn’t so. He pretends not to like me but he actually really does.”

‘Understandably unlikeable.’

Cha Ji-hye got more affirmation of such.

“Well, anyway, I was surprised. You are the first to so aptly pass the first exam. You showed the experience and skill of a veteran examinee.”

“Do I need to retrieve the board to check my results?”

“Whoa, you know about that as well too.”

“Board retrieval.”

-Name: Cha Ji-hye

-Class: 3

-Karma: +400

-Mission: rest until the next exam

-Time limit: 10 days

Class 3, 400 karma.

It's a decent grade.

“Karma prize. I wish to acquire the physical strength buff.”

Cha Ji-hye used her karma without any hesitation.

The words on the board started changing.

-Physical strength buff (assist skill) entry level 3 has been acquired. Acquisition possible from entry level 4. Do you wish to acquire?

-Physical strength buff (assist skill): strengthens all physical aspects

*Entry level 4: gain the body of a specialty trained soldier. (-250)

-Remaining karma: +400

“Acquire.”

Pat!

A light came out from the board and seeped into Cha Ji-hye's body.

-Using 250 karma to raise the physical strength buff (assist skill) to entry level 4.

-Remaining karma: +150

Cha Ji-hye inspected her body and repeatedly clenched and unclenched her fists.

‘I can definitely feel that I got stronger.’

A feeling of confidence and strength.

This is what the examinees must have always felt.

‘I should leave the remaining karma for now.’

Having made the decisions easily, Cha Ji-hye started talking to the baby angel.

“I have a request.”

“What is it?”

“You can probably read my thoughts but seeing as how you’re asking me, of course Kim Hyun-ho dislikes you.”

“Hehehe, is it a request to become a team with examinee Kim Hyun-ho? You can’t.”

Right.

Cha Ji-hye, having become an examinee, wanted to become teammates with Kim Hyun-ho.

She thought it would be of great benefit to Kim Hyun-ho who had lost all his teammates.

“I really can’t?”

“You have now only just passed the first exam, you cannot be teamed with examinee Kim Hyun-ho.”

The baby angel disgustingly started fishing in his ear as he spoke.

“Even if you were a 6th turn examinee, getting to a level similar to examinee Kim Hyun-ho is unknown.”

“What does that mean?”

“That person, you see, is setting a new record every exam. Also very recently during his resting period he has used a strange method to obtain more karma.”

Cha Ji-hye was astonished by Kim Hyun-ho’s potential.

Going on through the 6th exam with new records all the way!

So even though by exam he’s a 6th turn, in practical terms he may be stronger than an examinee with twice the amount of exams under their belt.

Cha Ji-hye thought things over carefully.

A bit later she said.

“Then I have a different request.”

“That one’s okay.”

This time, the baby angel read her mind instead of listening to her request and answered right away.

Ddak!

When the baby angel flicked his finger, the exam door appeared.

“An examinee that wants to go straight into the second exam without resting after the first exam. This is a first.”

Without hesitation, Cha Ji-hye opened the exam door and went through. Without a second thought.

“Oppa, don’t you think I got a bit fat lately?”

Min-jeong was in front of the vanity looking at her body in the mirror.

A yellow lingerie with a pretty design dizzily was simulating my eyes.

“Not even a little.”

I gave a plain and model answer.

Min-jeong’s body is far from a body firmed from working out and exercising.

But her waist is skinny and a little fat on her hips and lower belly is cute, just the perfect body.

....if I said that then all she would hear is ‘fat’ which is why I gave the good and casual answer.

“Aw, actually take a good look. I think I’ve got fat lately. It must be because I’m eating more after learning how to cook.”

She wanted to get rid of that little bit of fat, do you want to look like a clothes hanger?

“Right now is just perfect. I just want to save you just the way you are right now.”

“So you’re saying I did get fat? Right?”

Damn!

Is she saying she wants to fight? Have we been so uneventful that she's bored?

After thinking it over I tried one answer.

“Come over here, so I can take a good look.”

I pulled Min-jeong closer to me and looked over her pale standing body. Every time my eyes rested on her body she felt embarrassed.

“Hmm, I think I'll have to touch to now.”

“Aw, trying that again!”

Min-jeong began to fuss.

But with my extreme strength, I lifted her up and laid her down on the floor.

As I kissed her firmly on her neck, Min-jeong let out a gasp.

An astonishing reflex at superior level 1! Without restraint, I used my new mastery on her.

Min-jeong, who tried picking a fight with talks of being fat, is now losing her mind.

In the midst of having a really great time.

Ring.

My smartphone buzzed.

I kissed Min-jeong and with one hand I picked up my phone.

Hugging her with the one arm and with the other hand I checked my text message.

[Be careful of the Chinese. Careful and alert for everything. No contact.]

A number I didn't know.

But I knew instantly who this text message was from.

‘Cha Ji-hye?’

If my identity has been divulged, then the leak must have been from the Korean arena research agency.

And the only person who would send me a warning like this at

the Korean arena research agency was Cha Ji-hye.

‘This means someone at the research agency is selling my identity to the Chinese!’

There was Odin’s warning too but I had no idea that my identity would be divulged to the Chinese examinees this fast.

‘Damn them!’

Remembering the Korean Arena Research Agency, I grit my teeth.

I was prepared for it but now that it’s happening, it just made me angrier.

‘I wonder if Cha Ji-hye is okay.’

Seeing as how it was a number I didn’t know, I think she’s warning me secretly. If she is found out, won’t she face disciplinary action?

But knowing her, she will be able to take care of herself. She is a rather smart woman.

“Oppa?”

Having been completely immersed, Min-jeong was calling to me with dissatisfaction.

I quickly deleted the text message and put down my smartphone.

“Sorry. Were you waiting?”

“Humph, whatever.”

“What do you mean whatever? Now, let’s see how fat you got.”

“What, gross!”

“Weren’t you the one that asked me first?”

“Ah, no. Now that I think about it, I’m not fat anywhere.”

“No, if I take a close look I might see you did get fat somewhere.”

“No, I haven’t anywhere! I’m perfect!”

“There is no one in the world that is perfect. And you’ve already been aggroed by me.”

“Kyak!”

A sweet time passed.

But the inside of my head was filled with complicated thoughts about the corrupt Chinese examinees.

To dismiss those thoughts, I started hanging on to Min-jeong more.